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Fostering Intercultural Competence in Preservice Teachers: Using Infusion Strategies in Subject-Area Curriculum Courses

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Working Paper No. WP05-06

2007



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Funders

We are pleased to acknowledge the following organizations that provide funding in support of the Prairie Metropolis Centre: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; Citizenship and Immigration Canada; Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Canada Border Services Agency, Canada Economic Development for the Region of Quebec, Canadian Heritage; Statistics Canada; Human Resources and Social Development Canada; Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Department of Justice Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Federal Economic Development of Initiative of Northern Ontario, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation; Public Works and Government Services Canada; the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; and Public Safety Canada. The University of Alberta provides PMC with a generous grant and the other participating universities offer supplementary support.

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Introduction

The study was part of a larger study conducted simultaneously in three higher education institutions in the Prairie provinces. Three teams of teacher educators collectively attempted to answer the central research question: How can teacher preparation programs better address the societal need for developing intercultural competence in teachers so that they can respond effectively to the unique needs of the increasingly diverse student body? An important feature of the study is that it was initiated by three local NGOs and settlement agencies who brought to the authors of this paper their concern that the parents in the various immigrant and refugee communities in the city felt that their children's needs had not been met in school. The community members and the service providers urged us both as individuals and as representatives of the institution with which we are associated to better prepare preservice teachers for working with these populations in schools.

The study reported here investigated the experiences of a group of teacher educators at the University of Alberta working to promote the pursuit of intercultural awareness among pre-service teachers enrolled in their subject-area curriculum courses. The specific goals were: 1) to understand what pedagogical discourses and processes teacher educators can use to assist pre-service teachers in attaining, maintaining, adapting, or creating ideologies for increased commitment towards diversity, and 2) to understand how these processes can be infused into existing subject-area courses as a means of creating closer ties between the pursuit of intercultural competence and everyday teaching practices within various disciplines. The significance of the study is tied to the expectation that promoting the development of pre-service teachers' awareness of and commitments to ethnic and linguistic diversity can foster greater equity and social inclusion.

Given the human diversity present in Canadian schools, institutions of higher education have the responsibility to prepare the next generation of teachers to meet the unique and diverse needs of their multi-ethnic and multi-lingual students. This goal can be achieved not only through offering stand-alone courses on diversity and multiculturalism, but also when individual instructors take the initiative in constructing learning environments and applying teaching strategies that engage pre-service teachers' active appropriation and internalization of positive attitudes, beliefs, and commitments toward ethnic and linguistic diversity (Nieto, 2004; Sattler, 2001).

Background

Immigrant-receiving countries such as Canada espouse a democratic ideal that grants equal opportunities to all members of society. The education system has a key role in working toward this goal, so ensuring the inclusion and engagement of children from diverse backgrounds is fundamentally about the kind of society Canadians wish to create. However, research has revealed that minority students, both foreign-born and native-born, are often disengaged from schooling, due in part to students' perception "that teachers do not value or care about them, or that learning is irrelevant to their lives" (NAARR, 2004, p. 11).

As public school teachers are faced with a greater range and complexity of issues including differences in cultural background, the gap between teachers and students is widened (Sleeter & Grant, 1999). Research in the United States indicates that the teaching force continues to be predominantly of European origin, middle class, and female, with only 10% of teachers being from ethnic minorities, despite the increasingly diverse student population (Taylor & Sobel, 2003; Ward & Ward, 2003). Statistics on ethnic identity are unavailable for the University of Alberta, but the fact that only 5.5% of undergraduate education students represent linguistic minorities suggests that our situation mirrors that of the United States. American research indicates that many pre-service teachers have limited experiences and interactions with people from different ethnic backgrounds and therefore may enter diverse classrooms with limited intercultural competence (Ford, 1996; Milner, 2003; Milner & Woolfolk Hoy, 2003). These teachers may unconsciously rely on stereotypical conceptions of racially different students, and consequently think about these students through deficit models (Milner, 2003). They may also fail to see how they themselves are implicated in relations of social privilege and may be resistant to discussions of the "difficult" topic of racism (Carson & Johnston, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2003).

Pre-service teacher education can help raise teacher candidates' level of comfort and competence in addressing diversity issues during and after professional coursework (Burriss & Burriss, 2004). As part of their preparation for working with diverse student populations, "pre-service teachers must become aware of their own and others' racial selves and how race influences education-related decisions in the classrooms" (Milner, 2003, p. 194). Thus, the development of intercultural competence implies the pursuit of increased awareness, sensitivity, and understanding with respect to racial and ethnic identities (Milner, 2003). A broader definition of intercultural competence includes a capacity for cultural self-assessment, an ability to understand one's own sociocultural context, and a willingness to assume there are good reasons or explanations for differences across groups (Craig et al., 2000; Schensul, 1995). It also involves the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect and build on ethnic, sociocultural, and linguistic diversity (Lynch & Hanson, 1998). In this study we use the term *intercultural competence* to refer to the ability of teachers and administrators to respond optimally to all children, understanding both the richness and the limitations reflected by their own sociocultural context, as well as the sociocultural contexts of the students they are teaching (Barrera & Kramer, 1997).

Addressing Diversity in Teacher Education

The literature on addressing diversity in teacher education programs reveals that numerous approaches have been adopted to promote intercultural competence. Historically teacher education programs have addressed the "cultural gap" (Murrell & Foster, 2003) between predominantly White teachers and an increasingly diverse student population in an additive fashion – by creating courses on multicultural, bilingual

or urban education or by including multicultural content in curriculum foundations courses (Goodwin, 1997). The additive approach to multicultural education has yielded results in terms of student teachers' beliefs about diversity (Murrell & Foster, 2003). However, research into the influence of the courses on students' actual practices has shown limited effects (Grant, 1994; Murrell & Foster, 2003; Sleeter, 2001). From his review of multicultural approaches adopted in various institutes, Grant (1994) concluded that a multicultural course "is not long enough to provide preservice students with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement multicultural education in urban schools or to teach students of colour" (p. 6).

Acknowledging the inadequacy of an additive approach to multicultural education, scholars have advocated an infusion strategy for dealing with diversity (Horm, 2003; Vavrus, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zeichner & Hoefl, 1996). Infusion relates to the integration of multicultural education across various elements of a teacher preparation program. Rather than attending to issues of diversity in isolation from content and methodology courses and practical field experiences, the infusion strategy calls for intercultural competence to be an essential component interwoven into all areas of professional development. The adoption of an infusion strategy has assumed numerous forms. Cooney and Akintunde (1999) attempted to infuse issues of social inequality into the curricula of various courses by holding a symposium. The authors worked collaboratively with their colleagues to hold a series of presentations over two days. Education students attended the presentations and then related them to the content of their courses through reflective assignments and activities.

Another infusion strategy that has been implemented is intergroup dialogue (Clark, 2002; 2005). Several universities across the United States have utilized this strategy to bring together students from varying backgrounds to promote open dialogue about issues related to diversity. Clark (2002) noted that the structured interaction between students in the intergroup dialogue program promoted increased interest in learning and a commitment to "furthering the tenets of equity and justice" (p.32).

Boyle-Baise and Sleeter (2000) advocated the use of community-based service learning as a means to promote intercultural competence. The authors claimed that community-based service learning had the benefit of providing student teachers with genuine cross-cultural experiences, while also addressing a need within a particular community. While the authors cautioned that such an approach would not in itself develop excellent multicultural teachers, they did report significant benefits in the disposition of students to becoming competent teachers in a culturally diverse setting. Similarly, Murtadha-Watts (1998) recommended that school-based multi-agency collaboratives be established between universities and schools with a culturally diverse student body. She contended that experiences in a diverse classroom at the initiation of a teacher preparation program were essential to bring prospective teachers' long-held beliefs into question, making them more receptive to new ideas about diversity presented in coursework. Cooper, Beare and Thorman (1990) expressed a similar view in their study comparing the effects of a monocultural practicum experience and a student teaching experience in a culturally foreign setting. They found that students in the culturally diverse setting demonstrated greater multicultural awareness than their counterparts in other settings.

At some institutions, efforts to foster intercultural competence across the curriculum have focused on changing the means of evaluating student teachers (Vavrus, 1994). In these cases, the student teacher evaluation instruments were refined to include a section on the student teacher's ability to address issues of diversity. The assumption made was that the system of evaluation would influence the content

introduced in courses and the attention given to issues of diversity during practical experiences.

Literature on addressing diversity in teacher preparation programs largely focuses on specific strategies used within specialized multicultural education courses (e.g., Limburg & Clark, 2006; Wiest, 1998) or infusion strategies implemented at a programmatic level. However, very little research has investigated the experiences of subject-area curriculum instructors in their attempts to infuse issues of diversity into their courses. This study seeks to address this deficiency by focusing on practices that individual teacher educators can implement in their own subject-specific courses even in the absence of programmatic change.

Study Design

In the study we used an action research design, defined as systematic procedures undertaken by teachers to gather information about, and subsequently improve, the ways their particular educational setting operates, their teaching, and their student learning (Mills, 2000). Consistent with this definition, we investigated our own classroom practices while also considering the perspectives of student teachers enrolled in our courses, in addition to broader ecological factors – at the institutional level and beyond – that affect the pursuit of intercultural competence within our teacher education programs. The study was conducted over an 18-month period beginning in the fall term of 2005 academic year. The following disciplines were represented: elementary art education, early childhood education, and second language education at the secondary level. Sources of data include: a) instructors' observations and field notes; b) instructors' reflective journaling; c) student questionnaires; and d) guided student reflective journaling involving a variety of representational media (e.g. reflective writing, art work, creative work). Given the variety of sources of data, we used different approaches of data analysis that were consistent with the type of data. For example, the analysis of the initial questionnaires involved both quantitative (descriptive) and qualitative (thematic) data analysis (for more detail see Cooley, Dunn, & Kirova, 2005). The thematic analysis of the five audiotaped and transcribed debriefing meetings among the researchers involved coding of each conversation by the individual researchers on an on-going basis, and a consequent group process of consolidation of codes to form common themes. Similar process was followed in the analysis of student interviews. Thematic analysis of students' journals, including journaling through creative works followed a different pattern; it was conducted only by the individual researchers in relation to the discipline and the guiding reflective questions provided to the students at the beginning of each course.

Within each course we made modifications to infuse issues of intercultural competence into the various subject-areas. A different approach to infusion was taken in each case. In the course on second language education, intercultural competence was connected to the course content, particularly in relation to the topic of teaching culture and the connections between culture and language. In the course on early childhood education, an experiential assignment was created to provide an opportunity for students to work with children who spoke languages other than English. Finally, in the art education course, the approach was to use intercultural competence as the content or theme of artistic works. These different approaches to infusion are discussed in the sections that follow and are presented through the voice of each individual instructor.

Second Language Education

In seeking to incorporate intercultural competence into the second language education course, I began by looking for a “point of infusion”, which is to say, the portion of the course content that was most closely related to cross-cultural understanding. I determined that the closest and most obvious links could be made with the portion of the course dealing with teaching culture. More specifically, I chose to focus on the cultural outcomes that appear in the provincial programs of studies for international languages and cultures, under the heading “Global Citizenship”. Examples of such outcomes for Spanish language and culture include “seek out opportunities to interact with people of other cultures who have an interest in Spanish-speaking cultures” (Alberta Learning, 2003, p. 28), “recognize and acknowledge different perspectives” (p. 28), and “explore various strategies for enhancing relations with people from different cultures” (p. 28).

In addition to simply focusing on these outcomes and pointing out how they are tied to the teaching of second languages, I wanted to encourage students to explore ways in which intercultural dialogue occurs within the context of power relations that privilege certain social groups. With this in mind, I decided to incorporate “critical multiculturalism” (Kubota, 2004) and “critical language awareness” as key concepts in the course. Critical multiculturalism seeks to problematize liberal views of multiculturalism that focus on the appreciation and tolerance of cultural diversity. It points out that multiculturalism is about more than simply showing an interest in other people’s foods and folklore. Instead, it argues that our multicultural society is stratified such that different groups wield different amounts of power and do not benefit equally with respect to their social condition. Critical multiculturalism seeks to overcome power blind notions of what it means to live in a multicultural society.

The second key concept that I incorporated into the second language education course was critical language awareness. This involved looking at links between languages, communities, power, and social inclusion or exclusion. With respect to critical language awareness, course goals centered around understanding how language learning is a process of gaining social inclusion. But in addition to being a desirable outcome of language learning, social inclusion is also a prerequisite for it. The two processes are intimately linked.

In order to create a space for reflection on critical multiculturalism and critical language awareness in relation to second language teaching, students were asked to complete a series of guided entries in an “intercultural teaching journal”. One example of a journal entry asked students to reflect on the role of cross cultural experiences in shaping the desire to teach a second language. Another asked students to reflect on the ways in which language serves as a means of discrimination within our society. A third example asked students to reflect on the notion of “foreignness” (frequently used in second language education in such terms as “foreign language”). They were asked to explore what it means to view languages and cultures as “foreign” and the implication that they do not fully belong here. In many instances, the journal entries were used as a starting point for further discussion in class.

In reflecting upon the course and how to improve it in the future, I have begun to look for ways of expanding the infusion. I believe that it is important to consider how intercultural competence can be made relevant within the second language education course beyond connections with the cultural outcomes from the program of studies. In hindsight, I believe that drawing too close a connection with the program of studies runs the risk of perpetuating the view that teaching is first and foremost a process of “covering the curriculum” and meeting outcomes. Another limitation to my approach that I would like to overcome is the academic nature of the intercultural competence. I believe that it

would be more effective and meaningful if students had more opportunities to engage in personal reflections on their own experiences and cultural identity. Finally, I would like to explore ways of moving beyond words (i.e., written journal entries, class discussions) to make the intercultural competence more experiential in nature.

Early Childhood Education

Field Assignment

In contemplating the possible ways in which I could create space for my students to explore issues of diversity as part of my senior level, required Early Childhood methods course, I was guided by Schon's (1991) notion of 'knowing in action' as a foundation of teachers' professional practice. What experiences could I create that would help preservice teachers make their own (pre)understandings of childhood and children problematic to themselves? Would they see that there are other ways of being a child? How do I create a context in which they would realize the insufficiency of their own generalized knowledge about children and child development, and the limitations of their skills of working with mostly homogeneous white middle class, English speaking children and parents? Would such experiences result in "aha moments" for the students or would they confirm already existing stereotypes about what the 'other people' are like?

Designing experiences that put mainstream education students in direct contact with children with ethnic and linguistic backgrounds different from their own has been utilized in the United States as a strategy for helping the students develop intercultural competencies since mid 1970s (e.g. Bowen & Salsman, 1979; Hillard, 1974; Mahan, 1982; Mungo, 1982). These experiences, however have been viewed as 'miseducative' (e.g. Baty, 1972) if not accompanied by guided reflection. The rationale behind these practices has been that in them preservice teachers learn to interact 'in authentic ways' (Zeichner, 1992, p. 16) with children and parents from different ethnocultural backgrounds. A desire for authenticity in the form of concrete, hands-on experiences has been documented as one of the major learning needs of preservice teachers (Butler, 1986). Thus it appeared to me that field experiences that provide first hand encounters with children from diverse ethnocultural, linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds, have a potential to match my goals as an instructor as well as the needs of preservice teachers.

The more practical task then became selecting the sites that were likely to provide my students with the opportunity to encounter in a meaningful way a variety of challenges including working with English as a second language learners, working with children with disabilities, or children from low socio-economic backgrounds. I contacted a number of child care settings that were part of immigrant settlement agencies and inner city child and family resource centers, Head Start programs, Aboriginal Head Start programs, and child care centers as part of children's hospitals. The staff in all settings were very supportive of the idea of having university students working with the children in their care and were more than willing to support the students during the experience. Their comments reassured me that "having the students out there in the real world" was way overdue.

For the assignment, the students first had to observe the program they were assigned to, which typically was for children 18 months to 4 years of age. They then had to select materials and develop a plan for three activities that complement and expand the learning opportunities for the children in that particular program, and do one of these activities which they saw as being most appropriate for a particular small group of children and engage the children in that particular context. The last portion of the

assignment included a presentation of their learning to their colleagues in class, and presenting to me a written reflection on their learning.

In designing the assignment, I was apprehensive about how the students would perceive its value as it fell outside of the school experiences typically provided by the Elementary Generalist program offered by the Department of Elementary Education. Although early childhood education as a field includes children from 0 to 8 years of age, the students in our program view themselves as elementary teachers (i.e. K-3), and not day-care workers who typically provide care for younger children (i.e. 0-4,5 years of age). Thus the experience itself could be perceived as not relevant to their perceived goal—acquisition of subject area knowledge and learning to teach the basics for the age group that they were likely to work with in the school system. In addition, I was aware that experiences with diversity may cause “cognitive dissonance” (Middleton, 2002, p. 350) or create knowledge that conflicts with one’s belief system (Carson & Johnson, 2000). As a result, the preservice teacher could experience guilt, shame, anger or despair caused by exposure to the inequalities experienced by socially different individuals (Davidman & Davidman, 1994; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 1996). My hope was that being “free” from the mandatory curriculum objectives, the experience would allow the students to consider the various ways in which children from diverse cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds learn and make sense of the world. This in turn, I hoped could help my students question the validity of the experiences in which the children were not encouraged or even allowed to do that. However, based on studies that have demonstrated that “pedagogies that seek to develop a critical perspective toward social difference, i.e. critical multiculturalism, antiracism, feminism, anti-ableism, anti-homophobia, anti-classism and other forms of anti-oppressive education have not been fully embraced by pre-service and in-service teachers” (Solomon & Allen, 2006, p.3), I was not overly optimistic.

The following are examples of students’ reflections on the experiences that have been organized around the main themes that emerged through the analysis.

Emerging Themes from Student Reflections

Given the strong evidence in the literature on preservice teachers’ typical ethnic, racial, gender, and linguistic profile, as well as prior experience with diverse groups of people (e. g. Liston & Zeichner, 1991; Burris& Burris, 2004), it is not surprising that the experience of working at the community day-care centers was the first experience of most of the students. The first theme that emerged was:

- **Lack of prior experience with young children from diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds.**

“This experience was eye opening for me. It was my first experience in a classroom with ESL students since I grew up in [name of the city]--a predominantly white middle class town. I did my practicum there, and have not been exposed to that much diversity in children.”

“This was my first experience with a group of children from another country that had no English language skills. It was definitely a task at first trying to communicate.”

“As a beginning teacher, I did not realize the immense diversity that could exist within one classroom. I have often viewed school through a white middle-class paradigm.”

“I now realize how much more of a struggle must be for the families that access the centers services since most often parents and the children have very little to no English language skills.”

The lack of prior experiences with diverse groups of children and parents created a sense of anxiety and apprehension. Thus the second theme that emerged from the analysis of their reflections was:

- **Students felt worried/nervous and confused/frustrated.**

“My initial reaction to the classroom [in which] we were to conduct our activity was worry and confusion. After noticing that there was going to be a major language barrier (only one child spoke English, and the others either spoke a different language or were too young to speak any language at all), I was confused and worried if my partner and I could develop an activity that the children could be successful in.”

“I was nervous at first. Our biggest challenge was going to be the language barrier.”

“At first you get a little frustrated with yourself for not being able to communicate and help these [ESL] children.”

However, when faced with the challenges of the “real context and real children” the students used their resourcefulness and creativity and attempted new teaching strategies that differed from the ones learned in the program. The third theme that emerged was:

- **Students were challenged to use a variety of teaching strategies not based on language alone.**

“With the help of the [daycare] staff and the children I discovered different ways of interacting and communication with the kids. You just have to be very clear and really **show** what you are trying to **say**.”

“I had to think about how fast to speak. I knew that I would want to talk very clearly and not speed up. This is always a challenge as a native speaker of English. You always tend not to realize how fast you are speaking and when you use slang. I knew that this could be a challenge and I practiced reading the story over and over to myself at home so that I would read it at a steady pace and be able to point to pictures and have questions to ask about the pictures. In this way the ESL students would pick up on the words and connect it with the picture.”

“We wanted the ESL students to enjoy the activity and learn some vocabulary as well. We included as much action as we could so that the ESL students could make a deeper connection to the text.”

It is common to (mis)construe teaching as simply a process of delivering the curriculum (Kumashiro, 2002). However, the field experience helped some students realize that teaching is also about meeting children’s needs and helping them to grow and develop within the context in which they live including their families and communities. Hence the forth theme:

- **Students' conception about teaching changed.**

"This experience led me to examine my ideas and reconstruct my [white middle class] conception of the role of teachers. Previously I had been more focused on the academic aspect of teaching but this experience made me more aware of the importance of considering the emotional, social and basic needs of all children in the classroom."

"First of all, I have realized the struggles that are involved in working with ESL students, but at the same time, I appreciate learning that there are ways of dealing with these challenges; it is only a matter of figuring out what works best for each individual student. Second, I understood the importance of involving and getting to know the families of the children that you work with."

In addition to helping students change or expand their notions of teaching, the field experience was perceived as helpful in preparing them for their future teaching practice. The fifth theme was:

- **Students felt better prepared for their future teaching practice.**

"This experience has prepared me for diversity in the classroom. I became more conscious about developing tasks that were free of any cultural or gender bias, and forced myself to ask the question if the children have the appropriate background knowledge to complete the activity."

"This experience has really helped me to start thinking about planning activities for children who have different abilities and who come from different backgrounds."

"This experience helped me get ready to work with diverse groups of children in that I now feel comfortable dealing with children with very limited [English] language. I know that I will have some children who need help with language in my classes and I am no longer afraid to teach them."

Although it is somewhat rewarding for me as an instructor to see how my students became more sensitive about issues of diversity and bias and have become more thoughtful about planning learning experiences for children who are not from the dominant culture, I am reminded that "[A] false comfort level may undermine their ability to appreciate and learn new strategies and dispositions toward diverse populations (Burriss & Burriss, 2004, p. 203).

Summary and Interpretation of Results

The results demonstrate that the students have not had sufficient if any prior exposure to diverse student populations especially in respect to designing and conducting learning experiences with such students. This is consistent with Burriss & Burriss' (2004) study which found that "[T]ypically, in addition to minimal, if any, classroom experiences with diverse populations, teacher candidates' personal life histories tend to be restricted." (p. 207). This is echoed by one of the student's reflection: "I grew up in [name of the city]--a predominantly white middle class town. I did my

practicum there, and have not been exposed to that much diversity in children". While some university courses may offer information about diversity and theoretical frameworks for interpreting approaches to diversity, the practical or field experiences are the ones that challenge the students to examine their pre-conceived notions about school and teaching in general, and about teaching children from a variety of cultural backgrounds in particular while working in culturally diverse setting. As the data showed, they also challenge the students to use and develop non-language based teaching strategies in order to engage all students in the learning activities.

Field experiences like the one provided in my early childhood class seem, however, to be accompanied by feelings of uncertainty and apprehension resulting not only from the lack of life and learning experiences with diverse populations but also about what strategies to use with children who are culturally and linguistically different from themselves. In a sense such experiences require students to abandon or modify substantially the ways in which they have been taught to teach, and they themselves have been taught in the school system. It is not surprising therefore, that most students saw ESL students as a "challenge to be overcome" both before and after the field experience. The sense of insecurity in their knowledge and skills in addressing the varied needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse children inevitably created a sense of discomfort or "cognitive dissonance" (Festinger, 1957). As Middleton (2002) states, this state can motivate to students "to reduce the discomfort by making the component more consonant" (p. 350). Thus the drive for returning to a state of cognitive consonance works against the goals we have as teacher educators who aim at preparing the future teachers to work in a constant state of "cognitive dissonance" as they face on daily basis new information about a variety of cultural ways of being in the world.

One obvious way of addressing the above contradiction is to provide the students with more experiences with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in order to overcome their initial fears, frustrations and anxieties in working with them. However, these experiences may not bring about the change in their actual teaching practice if the students are not engaged in an in-depth exploration of their own cultural identity as something that everyone, not only the 'other people' have.

Art Education

Art Education is by nature a hybrid field of study, amenable to the incorporation of multiple layers of content, a range of production media and processes, and open to diverse responses and interpretations. In our postmodern understanding, art is about ideas and their representation in culture, and artistic representations are recognized as vital ways of constructing knowledge. An artistic representation is always *about* something, and creating such representations has long been recognized as a means of learning about not only the media and technique of artistic production but also as a way to understand the issue being represented. Social and cultural issues are central to the work of many professional artists and are core concerns of many secondary and post-secondary fine arts students who I have taught. Therefore, the idea of "creating a space for fostering intercultural competence" fits well with the existing practices and attitudes in the field.

The pedagogical approaches that are common in art education draw heavily on the value of constructing knowledge via studio production experiences and various processes of response and reflection. I undertake to model the interplay of creative processes, media knowledge and skill, art history, traditional & contemporary cultural representations, curriculum, and pedagogy through that topic. I work to impress upon my

students that images, symbols, and other artistic representations are not neutral. They carry meaning(s) that may be understood in different ways by different people.

Art educators have worked for a long time to legitimate the place of art education within the school curriculum, and in the process challenges emerge for our students in pre-service education and for those of us who teach these courses. In order for visual arts to be taught well in schools, and to realize the full potential of the visual arts to enrich the overall curriculum, pre-service teachers first need art-making experiences that remediate the lack of quality art education in their own education. Most students arrive in my classroom with little art making experience other than what may have been a mundane, if not devastating, experience in elementary school. Commonly held notions of innate talent, elitism, and perfectionism provoke a great deal of anxiety. Moreover, engaging in the processes of art making challenges students' preconceptions about the linearity of learning, the absolute nature of "The Curriculum", the formality of lesson structure, and the predictability of assessment practices. Incorporating the pragmatics of classroom practice in art education into a pre-service course raises demands that are extraordinary to students' previous experience.

Therefore, my students were already anxious when they arrived, and the established content of the course challenged their preconceptions about what art is, about the role of art education, and what they and their future students will gain from engaging in art making. It became evident that the materials and processes for making art were not absolute, but rather, they were flexible and open to experimentation and innovation as one seeks the best form of representation for the ideas one wants to express. As well, I proposed that all of us, including children, can create artistic representations of things we know, understand, or about which we are curious. While most students welcomed the alternative format and content of the art education course and took the inevitable frustrations in stride, others exhibited various degrees of resistance and dissatisfaction. I was certainly aware that incorporating a focus on the pursuit of intercultural awareness would add an additional challenge that would thwart expectations of making "pretty things" and that this was not going to enhance my Course Evaluation scores. However, from my previous teaching I knew that artistic approaches enable students to engage in reflective practice and to represent emerging concepts of self /other in complex ways. Creating visual work is also seen as being more open ended, less specific, and hence a less threatening way of expressing challenging ideas and concepts than verbal or written texts. If all went well, I was optimistic that my students would come to realize the many layers of content knowledge, attitudes, and pedagogical knowledge that are at play in an art class, and in particular, the implications of teaching art to children who are newcomers to Canada.

In our Department as many as seven sections of art education are taught by a group of five instructors each term, and although some specifics vary, we coordinate our graded assignments so that they are similar in each section. Art-making assignments are designed to introduce students to a variety of media and techniques that are appropriate for K-6 children. Journals/sketchbooks are for a combination of reflective writing, drawing skill development, and project planning. Students are expected to visit a local art gallery and write a critical response to an artist's work. Students are also introduced to the existing Alberta art curriculum (1985), and are expected to develop a sequence of art lessons appropriate for a specified grade level, sometimes in relation to another curriculum area (i.e. Social Studies, Language Arts). All sections use the same textbook, *Starting With ... 2nd Ed* (Grauer & Irwin, 2005) which has been written and published by Canadian art educators. Throughout our "Intercultural Competence" project students engaged in the use of the same media, materials and techniques as had

students in previous courses, but the ideas that were explored and represented were those related to the development of intercultural awareness.

I was quite concerned about provoking student resistance to the ideas we wanted them to address. Our Bachelor of Education students in general are well meaning and see themselves as caring individuals. I think that this perception was borne out when a considerable majority chose to respond to the articles *Art Education and Social Justice: An Elementary Perspective* (Chalmers 2005) and *Art Education and Human Values* (White, 2005) from the text. However, they do live in a conservative social environment and most have enjoyed an unquestioned situation of privilege. It was essential to eventually confront that position, but I felt that the appropriate first goal in this inquiry was to try to bring the students to the point of understanding their own immigrant backgrounds, to recognize that as part of their identity, and then to consider the realities of today's newcomers. The introduction and motivation for each of the assignments was proposed with that in mind.

The sequence of art projects began with an adventure with the much-ridiculed media of finger painting. The great value of finger painting is that it immediately challenges notions of photorealistic representation as the desired endpoint, and connects art making directly to the body. However, the full value of the studio work was realized the next day when students were asked to look carefully at their work and respond to the ideas that they find represented there. For better or worse they do recognize unexpected images, memories, and associations. Lines, fingerprints, muddy colored swooshes, and puddles of color carry meaning. What a surprise!

This was followed by a collage project motivated through a guided imagery (eyes closed) where I asked them to imagine a place or situation from their childhood from which they have drawn strength and confidence. They were asked to think about the physical or natural environment and the people who were part of it. The images that were produced were rich with memories of country childhoods, grandparents' homes, summer at the lake, baseball fields and hockey rinks. Journal entries filled in the stories.

The third assignment was a 3-dimensional self-portrait, created primarily from found objects, that addressed the question, "Who am I when I enter my Classroom?" Humble materials took on great meaning as students found ways to represent the many strengths and experiences that they have to offer their future students. Each student was asked to contribute a brief anonymous written comment about each of their peers work and once again, they were amazed that "most of them got it!" or "I didn't realize that people might see it that way."

Through sculpting in clay they undertook to represent, "What precious things do you know/think/ imagine your ancestors carried with them when they were forced/chose to immigrate/migrate to a new situation?" I introduced this assignment with an image of my own great grandparents and their family, the story of my great grandfather's criminal past, and my curiosity about the life and character of my great grandmother about whom I know very little. I wanted to make the point that Canada has been a refuge for all kinds of people, and we now enjoy the privileges of citizenship regardless of our sometimes disreputable ancestors. This project prompted phone calls home and visits to grandparents, and led to sculptures showing jewelry sewn into hems, coins hidden in loaves of bread, decks of cards and bottles of wine, along with blanket boxes, hand hewn cradles and family Bibles. My conversations with students revealed a growing understanding of how the artwork was not only a way to create an object but that they were representing their respect for the strength, endurance, wit, faith, and resilience that was part of their heritage.

Painting skills were developed in the process of painting about their understanding of what "Community" meant to them, either as they experience it

themselves or as they would like to see their community function. As I expected, there were many very nostalgic images of idealized rural life but some individuals were prepared to recognize that Alberta communities are really quite diverse and undertook to represent that reality.

Mask making was the final project and although we were rather pressed for time, many of the final pieces were quite profound. I asked that after creating the shell of their mask using plaster bandage casting or *papier mache*, on the inside they were to represent the qualities of Canadian life that they as a teacher would hope to present and extend to a young newcomer to Canada. On the outside they were to represent the reality that may in fact be the face of Canada that such a child may perceive. Many pieces were rather hastily done, with a jigsaw of coloured patches frequently being chosen to represent the “Canadian mosaic” cliché. However, one piece, created by a young woman who was herself a recent immigrant to Canada, chose to collage the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* onto the interior of her mask and to paint the exterior dark blue and adhere two Band-Aids crossed over the mouth.

Coming to terms with ‘otherness’, privilege, and responsibility is a process that takes more than a thirteen week course, but for several of my students I am confident that the seed had been planted.



Figure 1: Interior and exterior views of an identity mask created by Bronwyn Leifer

It was my intention to have students design a mini-lesson, visit an inner city classroom with a high population of newcomer students, present the lesson, assess their success and revise their lesson in light of their experience. Unfortunately, my plan was too ambitious and I was unable to find a school that was able to accommodate a group of this size (32 students). This necessitated a last minute change of assignment, which

was quite disruptive for the students – some more than others. The negotiated alternative assignment was to design a sequence of lessons appropriate for a specified demographic that I prepared for them: newcomers (a few months) from Afghanistan and Sudan, recent immigrants (2-4 years) from Viet Nam, Lebanon, El Salvador, China, and Bosnia, as well as students of Aboriginal and longstanding Euro-Canadian heritage. I allowed the assumption that all students have at least a basic understanding of spoken English although reading and writing abilities in English vary. I also noted that many families in the area are supported through employment in low paying jobs or through social assistance programs, hence they have limited resources to contribute for school projects. Students rightly see the preparation and delivery of lessons as their key role so this assignment was taken very seriously. In-class conversations revealed a degree of resistance to the intercultural concerns, usually voiced through exasperated comments like, “But how can you know everything about every different culture or religion?” It certainly did seem that their education to date had not provided most with a very well informed view of the world and many seemed to have little knowledge of day-to-day world events. As well, although I had provided access to a number of websites and documents related to the cultures in question, it was apparent from the submitted work and in-class conversations that only a few students had pursued this research. However, when I reminded the class that many of the students in the class would probably be Muslims and that in Islam it is considered blasphemous to depict the image of human beings, I provoked a pivotal moment of insight for many. They did want to be respectful of others beliefs and yet to do so they were going to have to open up their intended lessons to different modes of representation. To their credit, several students really engaged with the problem and devised approaches to their particular lesson that invited children to proceed with the project from their particular perspectives.

Throughout the course I had repeatedly advocated that teachers’ first consideration is who the children in their class are and what their situation is on any given day, and then interpret the content and teaching approach in light of the situation in their particular classroom. Consequently it was gratifying when, as this assignment was progressing, one young woman sought me out to tell me that she finally realized what I meant, and was beginning to understand the kind of shift in her thinking that that realization required.

Conclusion

The evolving composition of Canadian schools has necessitated increased emphasis upon preparing prospective teachers to deal with issues of diversity in the classroom. Research on multicultural education has concluded that infusion is a very effective strategy for promoting intercultural competence (Horn, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996). However, much of the literature on infusion strategies has focused on programmatic initiatives (e.g., Clark, 2002; Vavrus, 1994) and not the experiences of individual instructors attempting to infuse intercultural competence into their subject-specific courses. This article addresses this deficiency by explicating the approaches of three different instructors and outlining some of the issues encountered during implementation. Although all of the approaches held some benefits in promoting intercultural competence, each of the instructors acknowledged that their efforts in isolation would not fully equip students to deal with the realities of contemporary classrooms. Rather than undermining efforts to integrate intercultural competence throughout the curriculum, this finding reinforces the need for issues of diversity to be infused into all undergraduate classes offered to pre-service teachers. Further research is needed to exemplify approaches to infusing intercultural competence in additional subject-specific areas. This would create an archive of experiences from which

instructors could draw inspiration for developing their own approaches for preparing student teachers to deal with the realities of education in the twenty-first century.

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