

Chapter 3

Critical Practices for Teaching and Learning in Global Contexts: Building Bridges for Action

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines critical practices and agency of teachers as they wrestle with issues of diversity in the teaching and learning process. Using a framework of transcultural education and culturally responsive teaching it draws on research conducted in Southern Ontario, Canada and Central Florida, areas with large and growing diverse populations. We posit that schools are sites of social learning and cultural border crossing, where dominant discourses must be disrupted and the lived experiences of diverse students brought into the center of the teaching and learning process. Through the use of narratives and critical reflection teachers critically examined ways to develop agency and take action to create change. The findings highlighted in this chapter have significance for experienced and novice teachers, teacher educators and faculties of education and school leaders who are seeking to address issues of diversity and equity in critical ways.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we examine critical practices and agency of teachers as they wrestle with issues of diversity in the teaching and learning process. Advances in technology, the movement of capital, and the migration of people have created a world where borders are shrinking and social issues are global as well as local. We argue that schools are sites of social learning and cultural border crossing, where dominant discourses must be disrupted and the lived experiences of diverse students brought into the

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1665-1.ch003

center of the teaching and learning process. Focus on critical practices and actions of teachers can illuminate possibilities and impact agency. Economically advanced countries are becoming more ethnically, culturally, racially, linguistically and religiously diverse. People are living in multiple and overlapping communities and students have become increasingly diverse (Haan, 2012). In Canada, the population is projected to become more diverse over the next two decades. According to Statistics Canada (2016), by 2031 between 25 and 28% of Canada's population could be foreign born, between 20 and 32% could belong to a visible minority group, and visible minorities will make up 63% of the population in Toronto and 59% of the population of Vancouver. In the United States by 2044 more than half of all Americans are projected to belong to a minority group (any group other than non-Hispanic White alone), and by 2060 nearly one in five of the nation's total population is projected to be foreign born (United States Department of Commerce, 2015).

With these kinds of population movements and demographic shifts, it is important that students are prepared to live in a world that extends beyond their own experiences and engage in dialogue to gain deeper understanding of others so that they can participate fully in civic life. The new civic life calls for students to move across and within cultural borders. Critical discourses and actions are needed to broaden our knowledge of others, where transformation takes place through activism and creativity in classrooms and schools. Au (2009) suggests that discourses on transnational identities and multicultural classrooms take place within a context of immigration, globalization and colonization, where students' identities today are multidimensional and transnational. Educators must be brave and respond to difference and diversity within the schooling population, ensuring that curriculum, pedagogy, and texts reflect the diverse knowledge, experiences of students' history, ideas, lived experiences and struggles (Dei & Doyle-Woods, 2009).

We draw on transcultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy as theoretical frames to ground this work. These approaches open up spaces for discussion about diversity and equity in our increasingly globalized world where new epistemologies are formed and critical questions raised. They provide avenues through which existing knowledge can be critiqued, and power dynamics and injustices identified (McLaren, 2003). We came together on this project as scholars and researchers who live and work in areas of Canada and the United States that are very diverse, with common interests to better understand ways that educators can more effectively and critically respond to the growing diversity that are in schools. Teachers are called on to ensure that students are engaged in learning so that they can become global civic learners armed with the skills and knowledge that current realities demand. Robinson (2011) argues that if we are to efficiently teach and employ research to benefit ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse learners toward what we perceive as being academic success, then major changes are required and education cannot be business as usual. The chapter represents part of larger studies that were conducted in Southern Ontario, Canada and Central Florida in the United States, areas with large and growing diverse populations as represented by the statistics. The United States population increased by 9.7% or 27.3 million people between 2000 and 2010 and net international migration accounted for 3.2% of the 2010 population. In Canada, net international migration for this period was 2.2 million people, representing 6.5% of the 2010 population (Norris, 2012). While Canada appears to be taking in more immigrants than the United States the trend is still up for both.

With countries, cities, and schools becoming increasingly more diverse, the focus on student achievement and engagement has become front and center. To achieve this there is greater need for deeper cultural understanding by teachers. First we explore transcultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy as frameworks that allow for the disruption of taken-for-granted practices and possibilities for the critical action and agency. Next we share the research context and methodology and end with a

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