Chapter 17
Cultivating Cultural and Global Competence Through Collaboration With Diverse Groups of People

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ABSTRACT

Can cultural and global competence be cultivated through experiential collaborations with diverse groups of people? There has been a great deal of attention placed on the importance of developing students' cultural competence; however, primary grade teachers often lack the resources and training necessary for thoroughly investigating diversity with young children. To build cultural competence, it is imperative to create meaningful opportunities in which students collaborate on common goals so that children can have positive experiences with people of different cultures. This chapter will explore a research-based method being used effectively in classrooms in the United States, Mexico, and Ecuador to develop students' cultural and global competence through project-based experiences that meet existing curricular needs. In addition to the methodology used to engage students in cross-cultural project-based collaborations, this chapter also includes practical strategies for the evaluation of participants' cultural competence as well as qualitative data that supports the findings.

INTRODUCTION

All too often in schools around the world, a dominant narrative is told about groups of people and the places from which they come. Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie (2009) explains in her TED talk, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." When students have a limited perspective of a culture or place, they unintentionally form misleading stereotypes and biases which can have a negative impact on their interactions with others. This can reduce the opportunity for the

discovery and appreciation of similarities and differences. Therefore, Adichie (2009) argues that it is with a balance of stories and experiences that the single story can be overcome.

How do we create opportunities in schools for a balance of stories? As communities within our world become increasingly diverse, it is imperative for educators to become more intentional about building their own cultural competence as well as that of their students (Boix-Mansilla and Jackson, 2011). Cultural competence is defined by psychologists, healthcare professionals, and educators as the ability to understand and effectively interact with people from cultures different from our own to accomplish practical goals. The four components of cultural competence are *awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills* (DeAngelis, 2015).

Researchers continue to agree that in a diverse world, one's cultural competence is the greatest predictor of success because of the way it equips us with tools for handling challenges presented by life and work (Livermore, 2011, p. xiii). However, in elementary classrooms throughout the United States, a vast number of teachers question the need for discussions about race in the classroom. Teachers report that this is because the topics can be difficult, uncomfortable, and controversial. Researcher, Demoiny (2017), suggests the real problem is that many elementary educators lack strategies and resources for addressing these issues.

Knowing that we have a responsibility to build students' cultural competence, it is no longer acceptable to turn a blind eye to a curriculum that does not intentionally develop an appreciation for diversity. Fernandez (2014) emphasizes that "the implicit and null curricula are as important as the explicit curriculum." Fernandez (2014) explains that it is easy to overlook that which is not taught such as the exclusion of people, voices, and events. However, a more complete understanding of history, events, and culture is an integral part of one's theological formation. The National Education Association (NEA) suggests cultural and global competence be cultivated through an innovative integration of international exchanges and diverse experiences. Global competence which encompasses the capacities of cultural competence is defined by the Asia Society as the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance. Globally competent students are able to *investigate the world beyond their immediate environment*, *recognize perspectives*, *communicate ideas effectively with diverse audiences*, and *take action to improve conditions* (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). NEA recommends schools pivot away from solely studying culture through celebrations and events. Rather, it is recommended that schools teach culture through experiences in an effort to develop cultural competence in students and teachers.

With that came the driving question for this study, *Can cultural competence be cultivated through experiential collaborations with diverse groups of people?* This study was inspired by the need to dispel the single story inadvertently told in schools and the fears teachers have of "doing something wrong." It explores ways to provide an authentic understanding of cultural knowledge, beliefs, and values through hands-on experiences with diverse groups of people.

In an interview with Dr. Bena Kallick, co-founder of the Institute for Habits of Mind, she explained that she would cultivate cultural competence in children by building "equity consciousness," a term she defined as "the ability to pay attention to how much individuals have in common in order to know what makes their differences so special." To accomplish this, she suggested creating opportunities for people of different cultures to collaborate on meaningful projects that work toward a common goal. Likewise, when interviewing author, researcher, and educational consultant Dr. Angela Salmon, she also encouraged the concept of designing collaborative projects but added that these projects would be most beneficial if they were designed to solve real-world problems. Although Dr. Kallick suggested working with local children who have diverse backgrounds, Dr. Salmon identified the advantages of geographic diversity.

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