

Diversity Requires Implicit and Explicit Adaptations for Learning

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Abstract

It is important to include creative and personal forms of expression and diversity more explicitly into any curriculum that is inclusive and differentiates for all learners. This paper describes ways to support creative and personal forms of expression and diversity in schools and classrooms via explicit curricular and pedagogical approaches. It begins with an outline of a strategy aimed at exploring narratives and ideologies of teachers and then applying that knowledge to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) learners, including how they adapt to the mix of linguistic and sociocultural factors in their environment and defining best practice in scaffolding CLD students. It is also important to provide recommendations on implicit dimensions of any curriculum to guide teachers in how they should interact with and reflect on their learners' actions, contexts, and attributes; guidance for instructor self-assessment during their practice is critical for maximizing success with any endeavor such as this. A pedagogical perspective influences how one facilitates a democratic environment. The author suggests that learner-centered environments foster democratic environments. Environments where instructors and students are metacognitive and reflective, where they have a sense of critical consciousness, will maximize the desired outcomes of inclusiveness, collaboration, and agency required for a democracy. After outlining the strategy, the author provides detailed pedagogical and curricular components of this strategy and their impact on learning. The author also proposes a continuous revision of the strategy based on formative and summative feedback.

Keywords: CLD, Best Practice, Inclusion, Diversity, Differentiation, Dialogue

Diversity Requires Implicit and Explicit Adaptations for Learning

It is important to immediately state that a truly homogeneous environment does not exist. Where gender, mother-tongue, ethnicity, race, class, and economic status seem to be alike, there will still be diversity in emotional or cognitive capability, learning styles, motivations and personal paradigms; understanding these less explicit diverse traits of learners is key to differentiation and adaptation of curriculum to maximize learning for all students (Cullen, 2016). Including diverse, creative, and personal forms of expression explicitly into any curriculum with evidence-based pedagogical frameworks that are inclusive, democratic, and differentiate for all learners should be an overarching model. Also, guidelines and frameworks must be provided to instructors for fostering implicit instructional techniques informing how educators should reflect on their learners' actions, contexts and attributes in combination with teachers' personal reactions, existing paradigms and context. Guidance for instructor self-assessment during their practice is critical for maximizing learning along with ideas how to foster the same attributes in learners. Teachers must know their students' traits to differentiate, and investigate their own biases as possible barriers to maximization of learning outcomes, and have the best skillset based on evidence to execute this process (Brisk, Barnhardt, Herrera, & Rochon, 2002; Samuels, 2018). An initial, two-part strategy aimed at ultimately exploring narratives and ideologies of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) learners, including how they adapt to the mix of linguistic and sociocultural factors in their environment utilizing concepts of best practice in scaffolding CLD students will begin to prepare instructors to accommodate the dual implicit, and explicit requirements for optimum teaching and learning (Brisk et al., 2002).

Initial Strategy

Instructors must be taken through a process, enhancing the chances they will begin to adopt ongoing, active, metacognitive, critical self-evaluations of how they are meeting inclusive educational goals to maximize learning outcomes using best-practice. One can learn to know thyself by listening and sharing with others; in addition, concepts of ‘best practice’ can be explored and refined through dialogue that leverages the strengths of diverse stakeholders. Part one of this strategy involves instructors and other stakeholders in the school or wider community exploring one another’s narratives. The group may be asked to ‘share their story,’ detail ‘who they are’ what they like and what they dislike. What does culture mean to you? How are you different than others? How are you the same as others? What differences make you feel uncomfortable? What would you change in yourself to be a better learner and a better teacher or sharer of knowledge? What would you change in others? How would you accomplish that change? Finally, the participants will express their conceptualizations of ‘what is the impact of diversity?’ The second sessions focus on the group’s conceptualizations of ‘best practice’ with regards to affective and cognitive pedagogy in a linguistically and culturally diverse environment, as well as all the other forms of diversity that are possible. How would one optimize learning in a diverse environment? How would one define best-practice and what does it entail? How do you feel about immersive language programs where the mother tongue is forbidden? What if a survey of fifty evidence-based studies performed by experts in the fields of cognitive psychology, educational theory, neuropsychology and sociology came to a consensus, and that consensus contradicted your ideas of pedagogy? How would that information affect and influence your conceptions? The speaker speaks, and the rest of the room listens but is encouraged to take notes for a final question and answer session with facilitated, interactive

dialogues. A running list of explicit ‘best practice’ educational techniques would then be compiled and discussed.

This strategy can work in a single classroom such as in a collaborative teaching environment, it can also involve school-wide interdisciplinary collaborations in the context of personal development or workshops, or somewhere in between, such as the English department. The key point is, educational stakeholders, get together in a room and begin a dialogue together, and then the process is eventually repeated with students in part 2. The specific groupings, distributions, and associations of teachers and students should be flexible regarding the unique context of each school’s environment along with the scope of the programs.

Student “sharing and listening sessions” would mainly differ from those of the educators in that explicit frontloading and scaffolding would occur, with explanations to the students about why the process was occurring, and the language and pedagogy behind ‘best-practice’ would be presented to help facilitate a common language for the dialogues (Ford, 2005). There is no reason the dialogues and scaffolding could not occur in a multilingual manner if the resources were available. What exactly is learner-centered best practice? What would be explicitly undertaken in a classroom with regards to curricular and pedagogical approaches for CLD and all other learners? How does this strategy facilitate a democratic environment? What happens after the initial exploration of cultural narrative and ideologies? How does this session jumpstart an ongoing curricular and pedagogical approach to promote and differentiate for diversity?

Ongoing Strategy – Impact on Learning and Ongoing Revision and Assessment

A pedagogical perspective influences how one facilitates a democratic environment. According to the New London Group (1996), “Different conceptions of education and society lead to very specific forms of curriculum and pedagogy, which in turn embody designs for social

futures” (p. 73). Experiential learner-centered environments emphasizing critical inquiry and reflection inherently foster democratic environments over teacher-centered and knowledge-centered models. Environments where instructors and students are metacognitive and reflective, where they have a sense of critical consciousness, and inquire into themselves and each other in addition to constructing and synthesizing the explicit curricular content or subject matter maximize the desired outcomes of inclusiveness, collaboration, and agency required for fostering collaborative and democratic ideals (Evans, Montemurro, Gambhir, & Broad, 2014; Mansilla, & Jackson, 2011).

The best practice classroom would utilize Project-Based Learning (PBL), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and Understanding by Design (UbD) frameworks that emphasize student choice in deliverables for assessments and students would be involved in collaborative projects emphasizing choice, yet with multicultural and multilingual and global themes; opportunities for varied roles and utilization of varied media and technologies must be provided (Taylor, 2015; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; Katz, & Sokal, 2016). Dialogues would be facilitated often with discovery questions like the “listen and share” sessions that encourage self-reflection and re-evaluation. Flexible groupings (jigsaw, grouping without tracking, focus workshops, literature circles) would be the standard, though quiet areas or times for solo investigations would also occur (Ford, 2005). Finally, multilingual and multicultural activities such as cultural clubs, engaged positive activism in the community such as volunteer work with refugees, or with diverse groups in need, multilingual classrooms, and activities such as identity texts would help to make CLDs achieve high educational outcomes while simultaneously developing the global competency of students in the dominant culture and language (Brisk et al., 2002; Cummins, Bismilla, Chow, Cohen, Giampapa, Leoni, Sandhu, Sastri, n.d.). According to

Evans et al. (2014) multilingual and multicultural sharing activities where students can present to their classmates utilizing their native language and personal cultural stories, such as identity texts, “hold a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light” (p. 13). This ongoing strategy embodies the New London Group’s (1996) four components of pedagogy:

Situated Practice, which draws on the experience of meaning-making lifeworlds, the public realm, and workplaces; Overt Instruction, through which students develop an explicit metalanguage of Design; Critical Framing, which interprets the social context and purpose of Designs of meaning; and Transformed Practice, in which students, as meaning-makers, become Designers of social futures. (The New London Group, 1996, p. 65)

The strategy would always be a work in progress. Monthly meetings to assess the frameworks, pedagogical models, student engagement, and performance, based on instructor formative and summative assessments would guide any pivots in the curriculum, pedagogical tools, and ongoing projects and cultural events. Also, additional professional development aligned with the structure would be implemented. *Assessment for Learning* (pivot instruction based on feedback), *Assessment as Learning* (teachers and learners are given opportunities to self-assess), and *Assessment of Learning* (traditional assessments such as exams) models would be applied in the classroom and globally, however wide a net the strategy casts (WNCPCE, 2006). The net could also be expanded as the process develops.

Conclusion

This paper is an outline of one framework of how to support curricular and pedagogical approaches that encourage creative and personal expression, inclusivity, and differentiation for

diverse learners, including CLD, utilizing evidence-based best practice. To adapt to new and overlapping linguistic and socio-cultural spaces teachers and learners must share their stories, reflect, collaborate, and share roles to facilitate an active democratic environment where all have agency and develop self-efficacy in shaping that environment. According to evidence-based research cited in this paper and elsewhere, this is one way to maximize learning outcomes in a diverse and globally conscious school. It is critical that instructors are assessed during this process, and that they buy-in to the growth mindset that requires ongoing questioning and restructuring of personal paradigms, which is what this strategy attempts to facilitate more actively.

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