

ICE 2001: EDUCATION FOR ALL FOR LEARNING TO LIVE TOGETHER

WORKSHOP No. 3:

Shared values, cultural diversity and education: what to learn and how?

CASES FOR ANALYSIS

The need to learn to live together in a context of increasing and more obvious cultural diversity, although slowly, is triggering important changes in educational practice. In this regard there are now new demands since educators feel they have to respond to the students' learning needs and expectations related to linguistic and cultural diversity. In order to illustrate some of these changes, we have chosen three innovations in three different areas of intervention: the postulation of standards or indicators of good culturally sensitive pedagogical practice, the preparation and distribution of educational materials attempting to recognise and incorporate local knowledge and cultural beliefs and practices vis-à-vis Western-style curriculum content and the education of teachers, both at pre-service and in-service levels, in skills related to communication, mediation and conflict resolution in a multicultural setting.

These examples have been taken from experiences being carried out in Alaska, Peru and Australia. Although very different from each other, since they belong to equally different socio-historical and cultural and linguistic settings, the examples chosen allow us to identify keys to orientate new ways of systematically responding to cultural diversity. Such new ways also allow us to conceive new educational strategies for learning to live together.

CASE ONE: Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools¹

For several years, the Alaska Department of Education has been developing "content standards" to define what students should know and be able to do as they go through school. In addition, "performance standards" are being developed for teachers and administrators, as well as a set of "quality school standards" to serve as a basis for accrediting schools in Alaska. To the extent that these standards are written for general use throughout Alaska, they don't always address some of the

¹ More information on this innovation and on the results of the application of such standards can be obtained from the Alaska Native Knowledge Network or through the University of Alaska Fairbanks, P.O. Box 756730, Fairbanks AK, 99775-6730, USA.

special issues that are of critical importance to schools in rural Alaska, particularly for those serving Alaska native communities and students.

Within this setting and through a series of regional and state-wide meetings, Alaska native educators developed standards to provide a way for schools and communities to examine the extent to which they are attending to the educational and cultural well being of the students in their care. These “cultural standards” are predicated in the belief that a form of education grounded in the heritage language and culture indigenous to a particular place is a fundamental prerequisite associated with that place, and thus is an essential ingredient for identifying the appropriate qualities and practices associated with culturally responsive educators, curriculum and schools.

Though the emphasis of these standards is on rural schools serving Native communities, many of them are applicable to all students and communities because they focus curricular attention on an in-depth study of the surrounding and cultural environment in which the school is situated, while recognising the unique contribution that indigenous people can make to such study as long-term inhabitants who have accumulated extensive specialised knowledge related to that environment.

Standards have been drawn up in five areas, including those for students, educators, curriculum, schools and communities. These “cultural standards” provide guidelines or touchstones against which schools and communities can examine what they are doing to attend to the cultural well being of the young people they are responsible for nurturing to adulthood. The standards included here serve as a complement to, not as a replacement for, those adopted by the State of Alaska. While the state-standards stipulate what all students should know and be able to do, the cultural standards are oriented more towards providing guidance on how to get them there in such a way that they become responsible, capable and whole human beings in the process. The emphasis is on fostering a strong connection between what students experience in school and their lives out of school by providing opportunities for students to engage in in-depth experiential learning in real-world contexts. The focus in the curriculum is shifted from teaching and learning *about* cultural heritage as another subject to teaching and learning *through* the local culture as a foundation for all education. It is intended that all forms of knowledge, ways of knowing and worldviews be recognised as equally valid, adaptable and complementary to one another in mutually beneficial ways.

The cultural standards are not intended to be inclusive, exclusive and conclusive, and thus should be reviewed and adapted to fit specific local needs. Neither are they supposed to produce standardisation, but rather to encourage schools to nurture and build upon the rich and varied cultural traditions that continue to be practised in communities throughout Alaska.

Some of the multiple uses to which these cultural standards may be put are the following:

1. As a basis for reviewing school or district-level goals, policies and practices with regard to the curriculum and pedagogy being implemented.
2. To devise locally appropriate ways to review student and teacher performance.
3. To strengthen the commitment to revitalising the local language and culture and fostering the involvement of elders as an educational resource.
4. As criteria against which to evaluate educational programs intended to address the cultural needs of students.

In relation to curriculum development, the Alaskan cultural standards stipulate that a culturally-responsive curriculum:

1. Reinforces the integrity of the cultural knowledge that students bring with them;
2. Recognises cultural knowledge as part of a living and constantly adapting system that is grounded in the past, but continues to grow through the present and into the future;
3. Uses the local language and cultural knowledge as a foundation for the rest of the curriculum;
4. Fosters a complementary relationship across knowledge derived from diverse knowledge systems.
5. Situates local knowledge and actions in a global context.

CASE TWO: Intercultural bilingual education for Peruvian indigenous students²

Since 1997 the Ministry of Education of Peru is implementing an aggressive plan to distribute culturally and linguistically sensitive educational materials to about 100.000 indigenous students throughout remote villages and small towns in the Andes and in the Amazon basin where indigenous peoples constitute a large number, if not in many cases, the majority of the population. In Peru, about 30% of the national population speak one or more of 44 Amerindian language that are spoken in that country and they, most generally, arrive at school with a limited knowledge of Spanish.

Vernacular-speaking teachers and educators have written the textbooks distributed by the Peruvian Ministry of Education with experience in mother tongue teaching in rural communities of Peru. These school textbooks depict aspects of the indigenous children everyday life and also resort to traditional knowledge and cultural beliefs and practices. Such local knowledge and practices are regarded as points of departure for learning and as a means to approximate indigenous children to the official western-style school curriculum. Through this strategy the Peruvian officers in charge of intercultural bilingual education attempt to counteract the

² For more information on the Peruvian Intercultural Bilingual Program you can write to Juan Carlos Godenzzi at the Ministry of Education in Lima, Peru at god@minedu.gob.pe.

negative effects of a Spanish-only model of education implemented in this Andean country for centuries. Their approach aims at complementing local and Western knowledge and practices in a curricular scheme that allows for local enrichment and diversification.

The efforts made in line with the principles of intercultural bilingual education are in turn complemented with guidelines and principles for action outlined for all other Spanish-speaking students who are indeed the majority of the school population. The idea is to cater for the indigenous pupils cultural well being by disseminating the knowledge and cultural practices of indigenous populations also amongst the Spanish-speaking population. To trigger tolerance, mutual respect and intercultural practice at a larger scale Peruvian educational proposals at present consider it mandatory to foster an attitudinal change favourable to its indigenous peoples amongst its ethnic, cultural and linguistic majority. In other words, it is considered that the hegemonic sectors of Peruvian society need to change their attitudes and behaviour towards their indigenous counterparts for social change regarding multiculturalism and multilingualism to take place.

Peru is not the only country in the region attempting to implement such policies. In line with similar principles in other Latin American countries comparable efforts are being carried out. Indeed, nowadays most Latin American educational reform programs have adopted the principles of interculturalism to trigger social changes in line with a more democratic and tolerant understanding of diversity. In fact, in this part of the world intellectuals have begun to regard diversity as a value in itself and such spirit is beginning to influence ministries of education policies.

Such innovations are also the result of the emergence since the '70s of indigenous social and political movements that have claimed their right to live differently and according to their specific worldviews, knowledge and understanding. Due to these new demands, most regional educational reforms also recognise the need of social participation in school management and devise strategies to foster a larger involvement in schools of parents and local community authorities. However, what the indigenous movements and organisations are also demanding is their right to intervene in curriculum decisions since they want to make sure that their knowledge, values and practices and what they regard their children need to learn are also taken into account and incorporated into the school curriculum.

This is a new challenge for Latin American ministry of education officers as well as for Latin American society at large, since very little attention has so far been paid to divergent demands such as the indigenous ones. In Peru, very strong efforts need to be made to respond to social needs such as those emanating from indigenous organisations and leaders. Similarly it is necessary that indigenous leaders have more and closer contact with the students' parents since due to historical colonial oppression many times they fear that the introduction of indigenous languages as vehicles of instruction might jeopardise their children's future.

The fact is that vernacular languages are still regarded by Latin American society at large as languages incapable of fulfilling the functions modern society requires. During the 1999-2000 period an external evaluation of the Peruvian Intercultural Bilingual Education Program was carried out with a sample of 16 different indigenous rural communities. It was found that negative attitudes towards local and languages and cultures persisted amongst the students' parents, since they feared that intercultural bilingual education may retard their children's acquisition of Spanish and their appropriation of the hegemonic culture and ways of life needed to live in cities and in the "outer world".

One of the key factors that influenced such view was the insufficient attention paid by program officers to the teaching of Spanish as a second language. Although not as important as the latter, the students parents also demanded more and closer attention to curricular content related, on the one hand, to general and broader knowledge and, on the other, to those competencies and skills their children would require to interact outside their local communities and in relationship with urban dwellers.

The fact is that many times when a shift of paradigm or emphasis occurs in curriculum design we often fail to establish an appropriate balance between the peoples' learning needs and their historically constructed demands. In order to learn to live together both need to be taken into account. In the case of cultural and linguistic diversity and the need to respond to it adequately from the educational sphere, an appropriate balance is urgently needed between local and broader knowledge, cultural practices and beliefs and values. This seems to be the demand of many Peruvian indigenous communities, since they are aware that such a balance guarantees proper social functioning in a multicultural setting. They know from experience that they need to interact with others who do not necessarily speak their language nor do they share their worldviews and ways of relating to things and the world.

Many times in Latin America, indigenous leaders claim that indigenous peoples have always had an intercultural attitude to life since they needed to survive in a world that did not understand and accept their way of life. They also claim that the rest of society must learn to be intercultural and understand how others think, feel, belief and behave since only this way all Peruvian, regardless of the language they speak and the specific culture they portray, could learn to live together.

On the basis of findings such as the ones outlined above the Peruvian Ministry of Education is modifying its educational policy in order to guarantee interculturalism for all.

CASE THREE: Training Teachers And Students For Conflict Resolution In Australia³

The Conflict Resolution Network Schools Develop More information on this innovation and on the results of the application of such standards can be obtained from the Alaska Native Knowledge Network or through the University of Alaska Fairbanks, P.O. Box 756730, Fairbanks AK, 99775-6730, USA.

ment (CRNSD) is an Australian program aimed at providing excellence in the presentation of workshops for teachers, students and parents. Workshops have been conducted throughout Australia for thousands of teachers at every level of education.

These workshops are specifically designed to be experiential in order to improve participants' skills in the handling of conflict. CRNSD vision is to inspire school communities to actively create conflict resolution and peer mediation programs, to change students' behaviour to be positive and constructive. CRNSD programs give the school community the opportunity to develop skills to enhance self-esteem and create harmonious school communities. Teachers learn skills to pass on to students to make a difference in everyday life.

Schools are taught to:

1. Provide practical skills and strategies that are immediately applicable;
2. Create co-operative staff teams;
3. Develop new conflict resolution programs; skill students and parents in conflict resolution techniques;
4. Create school communities where people are empowered and motivated to create outcomes that work for everyone.

When CNRSD wishes to educate youth to be more effective conflict resolvers it is because our society as a whole realises the growing importance of changing how people relate to each other. When teachers are taught to be more effective communicators and conflict resolvers the foundation is set to train the Australian youth and therefore a new Australian future society which recognises and positively accepts diversity.

The specialists responsible for this program consider that training courses in conflict resolution and peer mediation skills are actually for the benefit of society and that every teacher who learns new skills adds to the value of the Australian society.

Learning skills to resolve conflict is now a very acceptable idea in Australia for teacher training at the school level. In 1986, when these activities started the

³ For more information on this program, refer to McMahon, Christina 1997. "Conflict Resolution Network Schools Development in Australia". En *European Journal for Intercultural Studies* Vol.8, Number 2. 169-184.

response to the term “Conflict Resolution” was often cautious if not resistant. Since that time there has been an enormous shift in attitudes and willingness to really look at the nuts and bolts of conflict resolving. In schools across Australia there are now many innovative programs at the level of staff, students and parents. There is a significant change in the approach to conflict resolving in many institutions, and at present this is escalating as schools model constructive successful programs with outcomes demonstrating improved skills and a reduction in violence and conflict. People in different parts of Australia are being skilled to communicate and resolve differences in a humane, respectful and supportive manner.

Two cases in which this new scheme is being implemented are James Busby High School and Cairns west Primary School.

James Busby High School has a student population of 960 and a teaching staff of approximately 80. The school is in south-western Sydney and has about 55% students from non-English speaking families. The school has been classified as disadvantaged because of the low socio-economic background of many of its students. Before 1992, the school culture included frequent daily outbreaks of violence between individuals and groups of individuals. While the school responded with vigorous applications of sanctions against perpetrators of violence, little was done in the way of teaching the skills of non-violent solutions to the problem.

Since the end of 1993 several activities have been carried out under the principles and strategies put forward by CNRSD. A team of six teachers was prepared in conflict resolution as well as a small pilot group of students including the School Prefect and students from the Student Representative Council. After that training was offered to all of the students beginning in 1994 and continuing in the following years. To consolidate this experience a special unit in “Peace Studies” was introduced in the social science curriculum in order to reinforce for all students the skills of negotiation so that individuals can have their needs addressed before they get to the point of conflict.

Nowadays students are encouraged to accept conflicts as a normal part of school life and see them as an opportunity to learn and put something right. The school principal considers that if students could leave this school knowing how to negotiate and resolve conflict by addressing the needs of all that would be a real achievement for humanity since these students would be able to live together in a diverse world such as the Australian one.

Cairns West is also classified as a disadvantage school and has a population of approximately 550 students. A large percentage of these students are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander decent. The school's vision is grounded in a holistic philosophy of “valuing people”. The philosophy is operationalised through a curriculum, which is selective and integrative, a management structure that is collaborative in its decision-making and teaching practices that centre on principles of co-operative learning.

One of the strategies which reflects the school's vision for sorting out problems is peer-mediation. Prior to the implementation of a school-based peer mediation program, the staff was trained on the skills of conflict resolution and in teacher-student mediation. These skills were actively practised and transferred by many into various aspects of school life. Then fifteen Year 6 (11-12 year old) students, representative of the school in terms of gender and race, were selected to become peer mediators, using a participatory process. Now peer mediation has gained much positive attention at the school.

The concept for a classroom-based mediation program is part of a philosophy that links beliefs and values about individual differences and conflicts with beliefs and values about children's learning. Classrooms, as caring communities of learners, value and nurture diversity, embrace peer interactions and focus on building relationships. Learning is active. It is about meaning making and it is situated and holistic. Developing responsible learners who have ownership for their learning necessitates a focus on relationships.

Values such as tolerance, fairness, respect and helping need to be explicitly taught in order to be shared by everyone. Only if values such as these are developed by everyone and if diversity itself is considered as a value in its own right, will we be able to learn to live together. Intercultural education can contribute to this aim if we expand its scope and go beyond educational content and construct new pedagogical practice. Mediation and conflict resolution can certainly help us both as educators and learners in multicultural and multilingual settings to prevent conflict in circumstances that are by nature difficult to deal with.