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15. BEYOND FOODS & FESTIVALS

As I enter the school gymnasium, the enticing odours of assorted ethnic foods waft on the air, and a fusion of Celtic piping, Indian sitar and Jamaican steel drums blare from cd players, creating a cheerful cacophony, while young people dressed in colourful costumes beckon visitors to gather at their displays. Once again, it is 'multicultural' day at a Canadian school.

In many ways, these kinds of celebrations have become part of the fabric of Canadian social life and schooling since passage of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act by the federal government in 1988. According to this policy, we announce our commitment to recognizing Canada as a multicultural society that not only tolerates but officially encourages the practice and celebration of pluralism. While this can be seen as laudable, we must think carefully about whether our proclamations lead to actions that address social inequities and the effects of power relationships. If we superficially acknowledge multiculturalism by celebrating the 'observable' artifacts of culture – for example, foods, costumes, and music – but avoid meaningful explorations and inclusion of multiple perspectives and knowledges, we do nothing to build the deeper respect and understanding needed for societal transformation.

Indeed, I am concerned that we are becoming too self-satisfied in our collective belief that we are becoming increasingly multicultural because we happily acknowledge that there is an increasing number of 'visible minority' immigrants. If we hold that issues of multiculturalism are tightly linked to and reflective of recent immigration trends, we can become blind to the historical reality of our nation. We might pat ourselves on the back, holding up our social 'mosaic' as much better than the 'melting pot' to the south, ignoring past (and present) examples of colonization, intolerance and assimilation. Instead, I think we need to understand multiculturalism within the Canadian context as an idea that evolved over time, with tensions continuing to exist between those who are willing to rejoice in and respect cultural diversity[1] (a diversity which has always existed in Canada) and those who wish(ed) to assimilate or eradicate it. While I do not wish to completely disparage celebratory events saluting cultural diversity, I am afraid that explorations of the concept of multiculturalism in schools rarely go beyond celebrations of ethnic foods and festivals. I think this is problematic for several reasons.

First, I think it is extremely difficult to develop deep respect and understanding of multiculturalism if the term only evokes ideas related to those material (or observable) aspects of cultural expression, including traditional celebratory

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costumes, housing, or food. When the focus is on these tangible features, learners can discover that some cultural groups eat foods they considered to be 'strange' or 'yucky'. This encourages the notion that members of 'other' cultures are strange or exotic rather than recognizable and deserving of respect. Without development of deeper understanding of the unobservable or non-material aspects of culture, including beliefs, values, and norms (those hidden, but reoccurring patterns of thought that lie behind cultural behaviours), cultural behaviours and artefacts can seem bizarre and unfathomable to 'outsiders'.

Secondly, 'foods and festivals' or 'celebratory' multiculturalism does not generally attend to development of deep understanding of where and how cultural differences arise. Without a meaningful exploration of the connection between the environment in which a culture originally evolved and the tangible and intangible aspects of that culture that have developed, learners may not see the geographic embeddedness of human cultures and, hence, might develop superficial ideas about sameness and difference.

Thirdly, I do not think 'foods and festivals' multiculturalism is generative. I argue that if the multiculturalism is only ever connected with ethnic celebrations, it is treated as a reductive concept where all members of a cultural group are covered with the same blanket. Also, when multiculturalism is used synonymously with 'visible minority', cultural differences among those who look the same – white, red, brown or black – are erased. In this perception, multicultural education in schools often becomes a way of giving a nod to ethnic and racial diversity (Fleras & Elliott, 1992), while continuing to marginalize and maintain status quo power relations. For these reasons, I prefer a critical (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2001), radical (Ghosh, 2002), or generative use of the term multiculturalism, which does the following:

- explores the multi-layeredness of culture by deliberately focusing on the idea that cultural attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours are shaped not only though connectedness to environment, but also though the intersections of race, gender, class, ableness, sexuality (and etceteras)
- acknowledges the power relationships that exist(ed) and evolve between and among societal groups and,.
- acknowledges the privilege of 'whiteness', and works to understand how beliefs and perceptions shaped by dominant culture effect personal and group behaviours.

In thinking this way, I argue that multiculturalism becomes a generative concept because the approach encourages us to openly question the sources and origins of personal and group assumptions, which can lead to understanding, exposure and acknowledgement of power relationships so that we can challenge the status quo and work actively toward the realization of social justice (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Critical multiculturalism goes far beyond 'foods and festivals' and generates possibilities for transformative learning.

These ideas may be interesting and glibly shared on a theoretical level, but how can these ideas be tackled when exploring issues related to multiculturalism with

teacher candidates in social studies methods courses? While I am able to spend some time asking teacher candidates to challenge cultural assumptions and explore how power relationships and the intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity (for example) shape individual and group identities, the learners enrolled in my courses expect me to focus on ways to teach social studies concepts and skills. As a teacher educator, I have grappled with balancing what I think important to explore as becoming social studies teachers with the more pragmatic desires of teacher candidates. Without claiming any special expertise, I have decided to share lesson/seminar ideas I have developed over time, which I hope help teacher candidates see the value in taking a critical approach to multiculturalism, while at the same time offering some practical ideas for teaching social studies content.

To begin, I ask teacher candidates to brainstorm a group definition of 'multiculturalism' and we discuss what might be the main goals or purpose of including multicultural education as a part of social studies education. Teacher candidates generally come to the conclusion that multicultural education should increase learner awareness of diversity among individuals, groups, and communities with the goal of encouraging understanding and respect for similarities and differences among cultures. We explore reasons why development of understanding and respect is important (not just an axiomatic part of Canadian life), and I offer the idea that development of respect for cultural difference can assist in creating a sense of belonging for all students, which in turn facilitates greater equity of opportunity for all students to have positive learning experiences in school. During this discussion, I introduce teacher candidates to the idea that simple celebrations of ethnic diversity (foods & festivals) cannot help develop the deeper comprehension required for creating a sense of belonging and interconnectedness. I suggest that there are some practical approaches they can incorporate into their practice; namely, by including critical ways of teaching and learning about connectedness and cultures; and by teaching and learning from multiple perspectives.

CRITICAL WAYS OF TEACHING & LEARNING ABOUT CONNECTEDNESS AND CULTURE

Exploring Origins: Similarities & Differences

The first issue we explore is how we can teach/learn about cultural similarities and differences in meaningful ways. Learning about cultural differences without deeper understanding of where and how differences arise can reinforce stereotypes and marginalization. In turn, learning about similarities can become trite if pre-service teachers simply adopt cliché phrases such as, 'we're all the same under the skin', without a more complex understanding of what this means. With this in mind, I begin our exploration by asking teacher candidates to approach the study of similarities by starting with an examination of basic human needs.[2]

As part of the learning experience, I ask pre-service teachers to brainstorm, in small or large groups, lists of 'things' all human beings need to survive. Once we have dispelled the notion that money is a basic need (which usually brings out some chuckles), and that physical requirements are not all that human beings need for quality survival, ideas are listed, and then clustered and labelled. During this exercise, interesting perspectives emerge about that which is necessary for human survival, but no matter where the brainstorming discussions lead, the pre-service teachers I have worked with eventually arrive at categorized lists which demonstrate understanding that all human beings have these same basic needs:

- Physical Needs – e.g., food, water, shelter, clothing
- Social Needs – e.g., nurturing, belonging, learning a role
- Psychological/Intellectual Needs – e.g., esteem, intellectual stimulation
- Spiritual Needs – e.g., addressing the mystical – ways of answering questions such as the following: Why are we here? What is the purpose of existence?

In developing deeper understanding of basic needs shared by all human beings, teacher candidates develop an appreciation of the similarities among humans that goes beyond simplistic clichés. With their more complex understanding of the concept 'basic human needs', I ask teacher candidates to contemplate various strategies they could use to help young learners build their comprehension of human similarities and connectedness.

Once we have explored the similarities between members of the human community, the question which must be explored is as follows: If all humans are the same because we have the same basic needs, why are we culturally different? To explore reasons for this, I engage teacher candidates in a visualization exercise that asks them to imagine the ways in which cultural differences could have emerged in the past.

I begin by making the claim that from the beginning, environment has shaped culture – that is, groups of people developed different cultures because of the different places where they originally lived – and similarly for all people, connectedness to their environments profoundly influence the tangible and intangible aspects of their ways of life. To envision my meaning, I ask teacher candidates to visualize two different natural environments and then hypothesize the ways in which each environment could have impacted what people ate, how they got what they ate, the shelters they built and so on. For example, I paint a word picture describing an upper latitudes inland plains region, where the dominant fauna are large, shaggy-haired nomadic herd animals and where the relatively extreme climate, with very cold winter temperatures, hot summers, and low precipitation, means that trees are generally only found along river banks and in coulees. With these bits of information in mind, teacher candidates are then asked to visualize how human beings living in such an environment met their physical needs – that is, what would they eat; what would they wear; what about shelter? Conversations usually revolve around use of the nomadic herd animals for food, which meant hides for clothing (which would be

needed, especially during the cold winters). Teacher candidates also conclude there is a need for shelter from hot sun and cold winds, but they realize that wood is not an easily available building material and decide that a mobile shelter is useful for people whose primary food is nomadic herd animals. Keeping these ideas in mind, they decide that shelters would be made of hides with some wood bracing that could be carefully taken down and re-erected in a new location.

For comparison, I then paint a picture of a temperate costal environment, with a salt water ocean and rain forests as the dominant features and again ask teacher candidates to imagine how about humans would meet their physical needs in this environment. Teacher candidates typically come to the conclusion that life would be somewhat easier for people living in a temperate rainforest by the ocean. A wider variety of foods, including fish and various kinds of more prolific vegetable matter would be available without having to travel very far. Shelters could be more permanent and constructed mostly out of wood. While winters would not be as cold, teacher candidates usually conclude that clothing to ward off rain and chilly humidity would be necessary and could be made of a variety of materials.

Through this visualization exercise, teacher candidates draw conclusions about why there are differences between cultural groups. It quickly becomes evident to them that, although all humans have the same physical needs, there are cultural differences because groups of people meet their physical needs in different ways based on resources available in their environments.

I think this is a good place to start because it helps learners at all ages and stages of life to understand why groups of people eat particular foods (for example). Instead of thinking of this as 'yucky' or 'strange', we can see that those food choices actually 'make sense' because this was what was available in the original environment inhabited by that group of people. Learners can see that traditional foods eaten by members of their culture are related to their culture's original environment, and so it goes for all cultural groups. Hence, different food choices become recognizable, and we can respect cultural groups for their wise use of environmental resources. I ask teacher candidates to think carefully about these ideas when they teach about culture in order that they might help learners in their classrooms come to understand that human beings are the same because we have the same physical needs, but also different because we meet our physical needs in different ways because of the different environments in which our cultures originally emerged.

However, this is only the beginning of the picture that I would like teacher candidates to visualize. If we only examine cultural differences by realizing how physical needs were met in particular environments, we are only getting at 'observable' or tangible cultural differences. With this in mind, I continue the visualization exercise, asking teacher candidates to think about how hunting large nomadic herd animals, as compared to fishing from more permanent villages might effect the social organization of the two groups of people living in the two different environments described above. This conversation leads to a speculative discussion about whether the two groups would meet their social and psychological

needs in similar or different ways. We discuss the question: Would different ways of organizing social groupings (arising from the different ways food was gathered) mean that members of the two groups developed different ways of deriving their sense of belonging and self-esteem? We speculate about ways that families or kinship groups might organize themselves; ponder whether the roles of men and women would be affected by different food gathering requirements; and put forward ideas about how individuals might garner respect within the two environments.

I then ask teacher candidates to explore how differences in environment might influence the ways in which groups of people might meet their spiritual needs. I ask them to ponder whether the group living by the ocean might honour similar or different deities as compared to the group living in the upper latitude inland plain; and if they think that embeddedness within a particular environment effects ways in which people originally contemplated the mystical and make meaning about existence. Again, I ask teacher candidates to think carefully about these ideas when they teach about culture and I encourage them to help learners in their classrooms come to understand that human beings are the same because we have the same physical, social, psychological and spiritual needs, but also different because we meet these needs in different ways because of the different environments in which our cultures originally emerged.

Sometime during this process, teacher candidates usually bring up the idea that direct connections between particular environments and particular cultures is often difficult to perceive at this point in history. This leads to a discussion about the ways in which interactions between cultural groups (including, for example, peaceful co-existence, mutually beneficial trade, conquest, assimilation and colonization) also influence and shape cultures over time. In my opinion, these ideas do not undermine the notion that cultures are different because of their different original environments, but rather the discussion adds to the understanding that culture is a complex concept, and multiculturalism cannot be fully appreciated through simple celebrations of ethnic diversity. In this work with teacher candidates, I ask them to take hold of the idea that, in some ways, cultures are like people – if we do not try to understand the events and circumstances that have affected them over time, we cannot hope understand their beliefs, actions and behaviours in the present. I ask them to approach exploration of culture and multiculturalism with these sets of ideas in mind.

While I think the visualization activity described above could be used in social studies classrooms with younger learners, my main purpose is to help teacher candidates explore their own thinking about where and how cultural differences arise. My hope is that in deepening of their personal understanding of the connectedness of environment and human culture, teacher candidates will approach teaching and learning about cultures with more respectful assumptions. Further, I think that this activity highlights the notion that culture is complex and that teaching and learning about culture must include study of both the material and non-material aspects of culture which, I hope, encourages teacher candidates to go beyond 'foods & festivals' multiculturalism in their own practice.

GETTING "INSIDE"

Another issue we explore is how we might teach/learn about cultures from the 'inside' – that is, how we can try to see the world through the eyes of the people who are members of a particular cultural group. While I absolutely acknowledge that it is not completely possible to see the world through the eyes of people who belong to a culture different from our own, I also argue that we can try. Because I think that all human beings are connected within the web of life – that we all have the same fundamental needs – I am convinced that we share physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual longings that are recognizable to one another. So, rather than teach/learn about cultures as though they are specimens under a microscope, I propose to teacher candidates that learning about culture must not only include explorations of tangible and intangible cultural features, but also must include attempts to 'get inside'.[3]

As part of this exploration, I suggest that teacher candidates should gather stories told by members of the culture and not simply rely on stories told about the group by outsiders. For instance, I demonstrate how cultural myths, legends, contemporary narratives, art, and music can be revealing of cultural perspectives ifwe approach these sources asking, "What do these representations tell us about the following:

- What do/did this group of people think/thought important?
- What do/did they value?
- Which work is/was done, and which jobs are/were most valued and why?
- Who does/did what work, and why?
- What games do/did children and grownups play – what songs do/did they sing – what jokes do/did they tell?

And, a question that will likely spark the need for further research:

- Why do/did they do this work, play these games, sing about these events, and/or tell funny stories about these situations?

Again, I use this approach because I think getting 'inside' discourages the notion that members of other cultures are strange or exotic. When we try to understand both the observable unobservable aspects of a culture from the perspective of members of that culture, I think cultural behaviors and artifacts become recognizable as we begin to see our connectedness; and this in turn, enhances our capacities to value and respect each other despite differences.

TEACHING AND LEARNING FROM MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

Another approach which I hope helps teacher candidates see the value in critical multiculturalism involves demonstrating and discussing ways teachers can incorporate multiple perspectives when exploring social studies topics and concepts. I ask teacher candidates to contemplate the argument that teaching/

learning from multiple perspectives increases awareness of cultural diversity while helping all learners feel as if they belong because they 'see themselves' in the discourses of schooling. In addition, I ask teacher candidates to take note of the fact that inclusion of multiple perspectives actually goes beyond study of ethnic cultural diversities, encouraging exploration of the multi-layeredness of culture. Including multiple perspectives helps teachers focus on the idea that cultural attitudes, beliefs, behaviours are not monolithic or reductive but shaped and experienced by race, gender, class, abledness, sexuality (and etceteras). Further, the examination of multiple perspectives acknowledges and allows insights into the tensions, conflicts, and challenges that have arisen and continue to arise out of imbalances in power relationships that exist(ed) and evolve(d) between and among societal groups.

To provide some practical ideas about teaching/learning from multiple perspectives, I have often coupled discussion of this issue with an exploration of the benefits of using a resource based learning approach. For instance, I have asked teacher candidates to examine a wide variety of materials I supply as examples of resources that could be used to develop understanding of a particular social studies concept, topic, or current/ historical event [e.g., film clips, picture books, novel excerpts, primary source documents and artefacts, excerpts from textbooks, photographs, webpages (and etceteras), created by or representative of various people, including men, women, rich, poor, (and etceteras)]. Teacher candidates are asked to imagine what their understanding of the concept or event would be if they were to base their understanding on use of only one of the sources supplied, as compared to what their understanding is if they used many or all of the resources.[4] Conversations arising from this activity often go to the ways in which bias and perspectives are shaped by personal points of view and by the kind and quality of sources of information available. By simply examining the impact that inclusion of diverse resources can have in representing multiple perspectives, teacher candidates see a way to build in the representation of multiple perspectives in teaching/learning social studies.

Throughout the term, I attempt to reinforce the idea by providing examples showing when and how multiple perspectives could be explored when addressing particular social studies concepts or topics. For instance, teachers in Canada are typically asked to help grade three or four students to develop their understanding of pioneer/settler *lifestyle*. I have used this concept to illustrate a moment when and how several perspectives should be included. While most teacher candidates can articulate the notion that pioneers/setters were immigrants (demonstrating their recognition of diversity), it is often the case that 'lifestyle' is studied as a reductive concept – in other words, the concept is studied as if every pioneer/settler had a lifestyle exactly the same as every other pioneer/settler. To engage teacher candidates in pondering ways to include multiple perspectives when planning a

unit with pioneer/settler lifestyle as the conceptual focus, I ask them to address questions such as the following:

- What were there differences in lifestyles between different groups of settlers – i.e., between French, Irish, Germans, Swedes, Afro-American, Zulu, Chinese, Koreans, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims?
- What were the differences in lifestyles or points of view among pioneers/setters who were women, men, children, elders?
- What problems and issues were faced by pioneers/setters who were differently abled?
- Were there differences in lifestyle experiences if the pioneers/settlers were wealthy or poor?
- How did First Nations people view the lifestyle of pioneers/settlers – e.g., how did First Nations people feel about the way European pioneers/settlers used the land or conducted trade?
- Did differences in perspectives and lifestyle experiences cause difficulties or conflicts to arise? If so, how were these handled?
- What resources can be used to help young learners explore such differences?

As part of this unit planning demonstration, teacher candidates examine a sample of fiction and non-fiction resources they could use to represent a variety of Canadian perspectives – some of the print materials they consider are as follows:

- *Spirit of the White Bison*, (Pemmican Publications, 1985) by Beatrice Culleton – First Nations and Métis perspective
- *Living freight,* (Orca Book Publishers, 1998) by Dayle Gaetz – poor, orphaned female forced (bride ship) perspective
- *Sparks Fly Upward*, (Clarion Books, 2002) by Carol Matas – Jewish perspective
- *West Coast Chinese Boy,* (Tundra Books, 1991) by Sing Lim – Chinese perspective
- *Silver Threads,* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2004) by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch – Ukrainian perspective
- *The Shaman's Nephew: A life in the far north,* **(**Stoddart Kids, 2001) by Simon Tookoome – Inuit perspective
- *By the Skin of His Teeth*, (Beach Holme, 2004) by Ann Walsh – 19th century perspectives in racial (Chinese) and gender clashes.

Teacher candidates often question the capacity of young learners to synthesize information from a variety of sources, which works as a good lead for future classes that explore skill building in social studies. Teacher candidates also question the capacity of younger learners to deal with controversial issues, which leads to interesting discussions about how young learners constantly face real life conflicts and challenges arising from biased assumptions, which in turn leads to discussions about our obligations as teachers to assist young people in developing their critical

thinking capacities by acknowledging rather than ignoring multiple points of view. In this, I remind teacher candidates that if we want all learners to feel like they belong in our classrooms, we must recognize that when 'the story' is told from one, rose-coloured point of view, we deny the lived experience of many students. To be inclusive – to help everyone feel that he or she belongs – we cannot smooth over conflict and controversy. Rather, we must help even the youngest students learn to think critically and help them begin their explorations into how personal and cultural perspectives and suppositions are shaped and evolve over time.

FINAL WORDS

Multiculturalism, as a term that labels differences between groups of people, does not need to be reductive; and multicultural education in schools does not need to be a way of giving a nod to ethnic and racial diversity (Fleras & Elliott, 1992) while marginalizing and maintaining status quo power relations. Multiculturalism becomes a generative concept when critical approaches are used in teaching and learning about connectedness and culture, when origins of similarities and differences among groups of people are explored, and when we try to see the world through the eyes of people who are members of a particular cultural group. Multiculturalism is a generative concept when critical approaches are used in teaching and learning from multiple perspectives.

Critical multiculturalism goes far beyond 'foods and festivals' and generates possibilities for transformative learning, through which we can challenge the status quo and support the realization of social justice.

NOTES

[1] To distinguish between the concepts "Diversity" and "Multiculturalism", I think of multiculturalism as a term that labels differences between groups of people, while I think of diversity as a term that labels differences between individuals (that is, between individual plants, animals, minerals, gases [and so on] and individual human beings).

[2] In addition to building understanding about cultural similarities, building a more complex understanding of 'basic human needs' is helpful for pre-service teachers as 'human needs' is foundational concept in most elementary social studies curricula across Canada.

[3] Considering that I find appealing Collingwood's contention that human beings can use the questioning, re-constructing, reflecting-on-thinking method to come to understand both personal experiences and each other, it should not be surprising that I think Collingwood (1939) offers us hope that we can develop some understanding of each other if we use this approach to get "inside other people's heads, looking at their situation through their eyes" (p. 58) – a process he called 're-enactment'.

[4] This activity can be done using a modified jigsaw approach.

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