Global Competence: Reflective Essay

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Metamorphosis

I consider myself fortunate that as a Canadian citizen, I have been able to interact with people of different cultures without venturing far from home. My parents were both teachers and instilled in me to respect everyone, regardless of race, and this is something that I have always “just done.” For example, I had friends who were East Indian, Italian, and Yugoslavian. When I ate a meal in their home, it was often a meal indigenous to their culture. No explanation was necessary; I ate, thanked them for dinner, and helped clean up according to the family rules. However, in retrospect, I never considered that these families might have been apprehensive about what I may have thought about their traditions. Perhaps they feared that I would return home and complain to my parents about foods or events that I didn’t feel were correct. Although I never took issue with my friends’ differences, my acceptance of their ways was merely superficial and immature. I accepted my peers without condition, yet I never took the time to inquire about their culture. Being polite and tolerant did not make me a globally competent young person.

Unfortunately, my early adult life focussed on searching for freedom from an oppressive first marriage, and my intercultural growth became stagnant until I escaped my situation. As my life found peace in a new relationship, I was able to become more involved with society. When I began my teaching career, I knew that my knowledge about the relationship between human and physical geography was not enough. I needed to set an example for my students, and this meant enhancing my understanding of what it means to be a globally competent citizen. I studied current events with my grade seven class. These weekly lessons always contained a cultural, religious, or political controversy that provided an opportunity to discuss and infer. Remembering my childhood, I encouraged the students to consider the issue from the perspective of the subjects in the reading; a “put yourself in their shoes” lesson, which not only encouraged the children to think critically, it deepened my understanding of intercultural competence. By the end of the year, these students could infer and critically analyze even the editorial cartoons in the lessons of the current events.

Furthermore, I was recognizing that my students had varied perspectives on cultural topics, which provided an excellent opportunity for me to teach them about respecting each other’s opinions. For example, as we read through a current event about global warming, one of my First Nations students offered insight into his family’s concern about warmer water temperature affecting the salmon population. When one of the students disregarded the importance of water issues, it allowed me to teach about intercultural understanding and acceptance. Anytime we had class discussions, I reminded the students to respect each other’s input; we learn from our differences. We talked about how this boy’s family might be affected if the salmon population dwindled. We discussed fish as a food source and economy for some First Nations groups, and I then asked the class to consider what would happen if they couldn’t have their favourite food or activity. Our conversation was incredibly engaging! In the end, the students had gained a deeper understanding of cultural values. They moved from the simple concept of “some people eat salmon” to abstract thinking about cultural implications for the First Nations people if the salmon population declines.

As I consider my continuous journey in global competence, a video from my Theoretical Frameworks of Education class resonates strongly in my thoughts. We watched a documentary entitled “Time for School.” which followed students of various countries such as Benin and Afghanistan through their education processes. One boy acknowledges that “Education is the key…nothing comes without learning” (PBS 2009). Despite the efforts of teachers, many of these young people experienced conflict between cultural expectations and a desire to learn. It was enlightening to see the dedication to educating these children. When asked to express what emotions the documentary brought about, my initial response was one of anger and frustration. It was heartbreaking to see so many opportunities lost for so many students. However, we needed to consider that other cultures prioritize education in different ways. I was looking at the video from a North American perspective, and even though I still find it conflicting, I respect the fact that many of the young people in the video considered preservation of family tradition more important than going to school for an extended period. The documentary reminded me that intercultural competence is vital as an elementary school teacher. We will experience diverse cultures in our classrooms and must set personal biases aside.

To teach my students to be competent global citizens, I plan on showing them videos like “Time for School” and present them with many inquiry opportunities to learn about a wide selection of other cultures. I will also address how various cultures deal with global issues such as climate change and ocean pollution. I am excited to teach my Ocean Pollution Unit and Create a Country/Culture inquiry project. Both of these units will expand student knowledge and encourage critical thinking to develop attitudes and awareness about local and global issues. For instance, as an extension to the pollution unit, I would like to have my students participate in inquiry assignments that investigate how ocean pollution affects various countries. Class members could then teach each other about how, for example, the people in India, Italy, and Northern Canada connect to their local waterways and how these waterways influence items like locale, economy, and traditions. By analyzing similarities and differences between cultures, I can make a Science lesson more international, helping students to understand better how our diverse and constantly evolving global society interconnects in many ways. As a teacher, it is my responsibility to take my understanding of global competence and share it with my students, helping them to become responsible citizens of a future generation.

*~Even though a caterpillar has all the components to become a butterfly, we cannot see the splendor until metamorphosis occurs~*

References

PBS Learning. (2009). “Time For School.” Retrieved from: <https://www.pbs.org/video/time-school-time-school-3-part-1/>