

**CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING: FOSTERING IDENTITIES OF
CONFIDENCE IN THE CLASSROOM**

by

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ABSTRACT

The following major paper has been created in response to the pervasive Eurocentric curriculum that exists within the educational systems of Canada. The paper has been written with particular attention being given to fostering voice and confidence in minority students through an inclusive schooling approach where accurate representation is given to the minorities that make up the classrooms of Canada. The ultimate goal of the paper is to create awareness to the issue, as well as provide feasible ideas for educators to create a culturally sensitive program in the classroom.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

*I remember a time when I was in elementary school and my teacher was trying to find out who the ESL students in the class were. When it came to my turn I hesitated. I wasn't quite sure because I felt that I had learned both English and Punjabi at the same time; however, instead of this being my response and having pride in both, I made sure the teacher saw me as English speaking; I was **not** ESL. I cannot name a specific time when my English was in fact contested; nevertheless, I had somehow developed a sense that it was. At a young age, I had already discovered that there was a hierarchy, and that I did not want to be someone who didn't have the power to speak.*

When I was younger, there were many moments when I felt discomfort, awkwardness, and even anger at my skin colour, at not knowing all the words, or cultural cues that the majority of my peers knew without question. Although I was born in Canada and spoke English well, my minority identity as an East-Indian, brown-skinned girl, simply placed me into a column as one who was not amongst the majority. I could not hide that my experience, and life often did not match those of the students I was growing up with.

Furthermore, through conversations and social situations I began to see that my family and I did not fit white Canada's norms or expectations. I did not have the "cultural capital"¹ needed to converse fully in many conversations. My family did not go camping in the summers, or have dinner at a dinner table collectively. We did not go skiing or hiking. The television shows I watched did not depict my life, but, rather, the life of the "true" Canadian, (or American) identity. My family had its own routines, rules, and traditions. Summers were full of weddings and cultural celebrations, and my family was not a mom, dad and kids, but a joint family of cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents all living in one place.

My social situations did not match those of the majority, nor did my understanding of their experiences. I began to devalue my family's native language. I began to devalue myself. I continue to experience the repercussions today, twenty years later, as I enter into new white-dominated settings.

¹ Cultural capital is "knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions" (Bourdieu, 1991).

My graduating paper has been motivated by the reflection upon these experiences I had as a child, and the further learning of my own identity that I was able to examine and begin to understand during a course I recently took entitled “Language, Discourse, and Identity,” taught by Dr. Bonny Norton. Coursework and readings forced reflection upon my own identity, my negotiations with language, and my feelings of powerlessness in many social arenas. I had forgotten so many past experiences and feelings from when I was a child, but in Dr. Norton’s class I realized that these experiences had the power to continue to affect me so many years later.

Prior to this course, I had assumed that my quiet, often muted voice was a result of shyness within my personality. Norton’s course helped me to see that my minority identity was also a strong factor in causing me to feel a lack of confidence in many social circumstances. I am a visible minority, who was born and raised in Canada. The fact that I am Canadian often does not seem to matter in the context of having the confidence to speak. I am consistently an illegitimate speaker due to my ethnicity. Through the years I have learned to doubt my own abilities to understand and to communicate. In numerous circumstances—from graduate studies classrooms, to the lunchroom at work, or in conversations with my school's principal—I have been confronted with this doubt. I find myself lacking confidence that I will be regarded as worthy of speaking, or hesitant in my power to impose reception.² I am an intelligent person, with ideas and contributions to be made, however, I often do not feel confident in being a participant. After reflecting upon my own voiceless nature, I began looking outward and seeing the same self-doubting identity in other minorities around me.

² Bourdieu (1977) explains the power to impose reception, as a power where “those who speak regard those who listen as worthy to listen, and that those who listen regard those that speak as worthy to speak.”

First and foremost, I saw the same lack of confidence in my mother—a smart woman with a university degree and a good command of the English language. She was born in India and came to Canada 30 years ago; however, she still feels small, isolated, and outside the culture of Canada. She feels immediately discovered as an impostor the moment she speaks, as her accent gives her away. When she goes to work, she feels unsure of herself. Is she saying the right things? Why doesn't she understand the inside jokes that seemed to be said? Are they laughing at her?

Next, I looked at the grade 7 class that I was teaching. The class was full of minority students with a similar background to myself, first generation Canadians, with backgrounds rooted in South-East Asia or the Middle East. Classroom discussions were quiet. Only a few brave and confident voices spoke up. Assignments and journal writing did not match the potential that the students had. I realized that I was a part of a school and a setting in which students felt they needed to respond in certain ways that did not match who they themselves were, and as a result, students were either not responding, or trying to respond in the "correct" way that was not true to their own understandings and identities. At the root of the creation of such an environment and school atmosphere came the teachers within the school, including myself. I was teaching the way I had been taught. I was asking the questions that I now understood, but could not answer when I was a student. I was not connecting to the students and their stories and experiences.

In the staffroom, teachers were constantly joking or venting about the mundane stories these students were telling. They were upset by the lack of experiences these children had to talk about. *"Did these kids do anything but go to their cousin's house?"* I knew the kids were a lot like me. They had plenty of rich and vibrant stories to tell;

however, something was keeping them from telling them. Stories of going to the grocery store or the park with family were all that they felt comfortable sharing, or knew how to share. The teachers, including myself, needed to learn a new way of conversing with students in order to truly hear the diversity of what these students had to say.

My motivation has, therefore, stemmed from my own personal experiences and the observations I have made in seeing my mother, my students, and my teaching peers. Minority identity and voice/confidence are the focus of my graduating paper. Ultimately, through research, I am seeking ways I can help foster identities of confidence in the classroom, no matter what cultural background students bring. How can I encourage voices of diversity and create a safe environment for all speakers? Furthermore, how can I allow these students to hold onto this confidence outside the classroom, in whatever space and setting they find themselves in? With equal importance, I hope that by encouraging the voices of the *minority*, perhaps teachers can begin a larger change—one that encourages the *majority* to accept and understand minorities and their voices and experiences so that outside the classroom, when someone like my mother is interacting, she can feel confident in her voice and experiences, even if she herself has not been in one of these classrooms that build self-confidence.

The Project

In this paper, I will discuss the following three major areas: Firstly, I review the literature that is available in order to see what it has to say about minority identity and voice in the classroom. Secondly, I review what is being said about Eurocentric practices that are deeply rooted in the Canadian education system and that are keeping minorities from truly being a part of the classroom and the culture. Finally, I review what particular

programs or strategies have been created for classroom teachers to employ in order to foster a confident minority identity and voice.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholar Ivan Illich once noted, "[s]o persuasive is the power of institutions we have created, that they shape not only our preferences, but actually our sense of possibilities ... we have embodied our world view into our institutions and are now their prisoners" (as cited in Battiste, Bell & Findlay, 2002, p.83). Thus, it can be argued educational institutions are at the forefront of shaping the lives and identities of the students who participate within them. The minority students who attend and participate in our school systems likely feel the greatest impact. Educational institutions are often the first portal into western culture and norms for minority students. They teach these students who they are and where they stand in society. The focus of this research project is to look at the policies of the Canadian school system in terms of diversity, and the consequences that the current policies and practices have upon minority students in the system—students who, it is posited, struggle to have their voices, cultures and beliefs recognized within the institution of the Canadian educational system.

History of Assimilating Policy and Practice

Within the literature on minority education and identity, common themes have emerged. One of these themes has been the Canadian education system itself. In order to tackle the issue of discrimination and minority education, discussion has centered on the question: What can we learn from the history of minority education within the Canadian education system? If the Canadian education system is to become responsive to the needs of minority students, it is important for educators and policy makers to know the history of the oppression that has been a part of the Canadian educational system—this

oppression is at the root of minority marginalization. Knowing who we once were as a nation, and our journey, are pivotal in helping locate where we are and where we still need to journey.

The history of Canadian schools is shrouded in numerous racist and prejudicial practices and policies. In the past, assimilationist practices were more visible and overt; Aboriginal residential schools and Japanese internment camps are examples. Such discriminatory activities were prevalent as recently as the 1970s. For example, it was not uncommon to read observations such as the following found in a university textbook:

In the sixteenth century some two hundred thousand red Indians and a few thousand Eskimos lived in Canada. Supposedly the original inhabitants of North America... Each of the four major groupings of Indians who were spread more or less evenly across Canada in the sixteenth century lived in one or another form of stone-age culture... although the Iroquois and one or two other groups had developed a quasi-settled life and a primitive agriculture, the nomad was never far beneath the Indian skin. (McNaught, 1971, as cited in Anderson & Pohl, 2002, p. 16)

Today, Canada has attempted to right the wrongs of yesterday, especially as exemplified in new goals and policies related to the Aboriginal community. Recently, the Supreme Court of Canada made it their constitutional goal to preserve the defining and most important features of distinctive Aboriginal groups (Battiste, 1998, p. 18). However, bodies of research show, even with these new constitutions and attitudes, the fight against persistent marginalization and the sly assimilation of minorities in Canadian schools continues. Assimilation is imbedded deeply in the Canadian system, and

Canadians are often naively unaware, or simply ignore the effects, of such a system. Most administrators and decision-makers are not even aware of the systemic bias inherent within their institutions, and even if they do become aware, their tendency is to downplay the frequency of such bias (Elabor-Idemudia, 2001, p. 192).

Eurocentric Curriculum

Presently, within education, an institutionalized Eurocentrism is the subtle yet persistent form of assimilation that has yet to be surfaced and challenged. Eurocentrism comes from colonialism and imperialism—concepts associated with a history that has ended. Eurocentrism, however, continues to exist on a deep and persistent level within our Canadian educational system. As Baskin (2002) notes:

Despite the diversity of today's classrooms, rarely are the histories, values, beliefs and bodies of students taken into account as part of learning for all. Their ways of understanding the world and relating to it are not provided a space within educational discourse. (p. 2)

Principles of Anglocentric and Eurocentric conformity are promoted in Canadian schools within the curriculum that is being valued, and in the ways in which history is discussed and perceived. For example, within the history curriculum, students are being taught an exclusive curriculum that silences the contributions of many of the minorities who comprise the classrooms in which they are learning. The story of Canada's history has been shaped around the dominant group's story. As a result, the curriculum begins to define some students as "Canadian," and others as "non-Canadian." The pedagogy of

Canada's history needs to be challenged and changed from a Eurocentric viewpoint to one that encompasses each student's past.

This Eurocentric narrative oftentimes causes minority groups who do not see themselves represented in the curriculum to begin to disengage from school. The belief is often that "school is about and for white people" (Stanley, 2002, p. 14). Jasmin Zine, a researcher in critical race and ethnic studies, supports this with insights into her own personal experiences, experiences where she was pushed to the margins of educational discourses. She writes that the history that is taught does not include many minority groups, including her own Pakistani-Muslim background, and therefore "erases [her] identity from the canons of knowledge, and renders [her] invisible" (Zine, 2002, p. 37).

An example of the Canadian schooling system reflecting a "white perspective" can be seen in a seemingly innocent lesson focused around the question, "When, in the twentieth century did women get the right to vote in elections?" Typically, the answer that the curriculum supports as being the correct answer is in the early 1900s when English speaking women whose background was of European origin were given the right to vote (example from Stanley, p.14). However, this does not reflect the experience of Aboriginal women who did not have the right to vote until the 1960s or women from Quebec who were given voting rights in 1940. The answer to this question speaks to who is perceived as legitimate Canadians. There are numerous other examples of a Eurocentricized lens on history that are being taught daily in Canadian schools.

Another example is religion. Christianity is the religion of Eurocentrism, and although students are no longer required to learn Christian prayers and hymns, the religion is still privileged over others as illustrated by the way in which the school

calendar is set up. School holidays are set to coincide with Christmas and Easter. Also, seasonal projects are typically related to these holidays and not to the other religions represented in schools today. “Our classrooms include students from many religions backgrounds, and this “Christian normalcy” causes those who are not Christian to feel just the opposite” (Joshi, 2007, para. 5).

Examples of Eurocentrism that are imbedded in Canadian educational institutions are too numerous to name. The key idea being presented is simply that it is rampant, and deeply embedded in the system, and one of the causal reasons for the marginalization and devaluing of minority groups.

Multicultural Policy

It has been acknowledged that change needs to occur to advocate for and be representative of the plethora of minority groups that make up the nation of Canada. As mentioned earlier, the Canadian government has made attempts to right the wrongs of its past, and integrate new multicultural policies and directives, especially those directed towards the Indigenous peoples’ communities. All school boards have goals and plans directed towards helping Aboriginal students achieve success and incorporating Indigenous content into the provincial curricula. These new learning outcomes, however, have been developed away from the Aboriginal communities they are supposed to represent (Battiste, 1998, p. 21). Battiste, Belle and Findlay note that Eurocentric and colonial perspectives are consistently reaffirmed within the curriculum as “areas of excellence, integration and modernity” (2002, p. 88). It should be said that universities have become more accessible for Aboriginal students, and enrollment of Aboriginal students has gone up. However, it can be argued that much of the content being taught in

these universities is still comprised of the Eurocentric canons, with Aboriginal content being taught as less important add-ons (Battiste, Belle & Findlay, 2002, p.83). This raises the question: How can Aboriginal students ever identify with a curriculum that begins with the exclusion of their peoples and continues by treating them as little more than the scenery, or as disrupters of the inevitable national progress? (Stanley, 2002, p.14)

Like the initiatives that focus on Aboriginal advocacy, the multicultural reforms that pertain to all minority groups are also flawed. The notion of “multiculturalism” has come to be implemented on some level through pedagogical practices within Canadian classrooms; however, oftentimes, it is simply lip-service integrated into policies, while the Eurocentric curriculum continues to be implemented. The concept of “multiculturalism” does not address the problems of Eurocentrism; it typically becomes an add-on to the core Eurocentric curriculum, and creates a “tourist spectacle” (Zine, 2002, p.37) of the cultures it attempts to value. The new focus in Canada is to be responsive to diversity by creating a learning environment that acknowledges the cultures of all students. During the 1970s, numerous professional development sessions were offered to support teachers. In these sessions, teachers were taught about creating “multicultural days” and given lessons on the holocaust, or invited to talk about the cultures of nations around the world. Celebrations such as Channukah and Chinese New Year were celebrated. By the 1980s, however, people were “dissatisfied with the fact that there had been few, if any, changes to the Eurocentric curriculum, and that multicultural education initiatives were simply a recognition of culture in terms of food,

music and costumes...” (James, 2004, p.44). Nearly 30 years later, the trend to use a tourist approach towards the multiple cultures of the nation continues.

Possible Change

Within the literature that focused on creating a deep and meaningful change in Canadian educational policies towards minority cultures, many examples and suggestions were made:

Inclusive Schooling

Re-Generating Knowledge: Inclusive Education and Research by Cyndy Baskin (2002) poses a solution through a concept of “inclusive schooling.” Baskin’s inclusive schooling asks for schools to represent all students in the books, posters, texts, etc., with a focus on decentralizing the Eurocentric base in education to begin promoting a global perspective. “Inclusive schooling means that a school is inclusive if every student can identify and connect with the school’s social environment, culture and organization” (Baskin, 2002, p.3). The idea is that there be visual representations and knowledge representations of all student communities. One suggested way of doing this is to include Indigenous scholars, Elders, artists and storytellers as legitimate sources of knowledge as part of the curriculum and in teaching practice, and to incorporate the voices and histories from all religious and spiritual backgrounds. Within inclusive schooling is also a need for a diversity of staff. “Not seeing anyone in the school administration who looks like you is a constant reminder of the glass ceilings that limit your chances to achieve positions of power and authority because of your...social difference” (Zine, 2002, p.37). Finally, in an inclusive schooling model parents and communities need to be invited into

the schools. “It is imperative that Aboriginal and other minority group parents and their communities participate in the educational system in order to add to it and change it for the better” (Baskin, 2002, p.7).

Anti-racism Education

Inclusive Schooling in a Plural Society: Removing the Margins by Jasmin Zine (2002) discusses a framework of *anti-racism education* that follows a similar path to Baskin. It is a framework that moves towards

[D]ealing directly with the issues of power and subordination that are often masked by multiculturalism. An anti-racist approach examines the social, cultural, economic and political relations of privilege and disadvantage that occur among differentially empowered groups in society....This approach views education as a means toward greater social justice and equity in schools and society (2002, p.37).

Like Baskin, Zine believes in the legitimizing and valuing of “other” voices of knowledge. In Zine’s approach, there needs to be an integration of multiple centres of knowledge, a push towards social and educational change by uncovering the imbalances, recognizing and respecting difference, and focusing on teaching for youth and community empowerment.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy goes by many names: culturally responsible, culturally relevant, culturally compatible, culturally congruent, or multicultural. Regardless of what title is being used, this teaching methodology is one that is sensitive and responsive to the cultures and backgrounds of the student and this is incorporated

into their teaching. Within culturally responsive pedagogy teachers show responsiveness to their students by being sensitive to their needs, interests, and learning preferences (Irvine & Armento, 2001, p. 4). There are no set lessons within this pedagogical approach; it is a generalized set of goals to aim for. Within this teaching lens, teachers are encouraged to modify their knowledge and training as they pay closer attention to the classroom contexts and to *each* student's individual cultures, needs and experiences. Students cannot be stereotyped; teachers cannot follow one teaching method blindly, or use one set of materials for all students (Irvine, 2003, p. 74). It is hoped that teachers will listen to their students, and encourage them to share their own personal histories and connections during classroom time. Within culturally responsive teaching, it is important to encourage this expression on a regular basis, and not just on cultural holidays or celebrations. Students should connect with the content of instruction, and share these connections regularly.

Ultimately, teachers are creating deeper and more personal relationships within their classrooms. They should know the cultural resources that their students are bringing to their classrooms, and with this implement an enriched curriculum that is for *all* students. By using a culturally responsive pedagogical approach, teachers can act as a bridge between the curriculum and cultural backgrounds of their students.

Other Suggestions

In response to a curriculum that is “for and about white people” Timothy Stanley creates suggestions that allow students to help intertwine themselves into the curriculum, to give them their own voice. His suggestions are to allow each student to explore his/her own past to explain how they came to be a part of the Canadian landscape, and to share

this narrative. In addition, he suggests discovering the relationships and intertwining of multiple communities inside and outside of Canada to discover links. Finally, he makes the point that while “Canadians in fact do not have a common history, and no single narrative will ever make it so” (p.15), “teachers have the resources and methods to incorporate multiple narratives into the classroom” (p. 15). It is up to teachers to seek out these resources.

Minority Voice and Identity

The Eurocentric history and worldview that have been inherited by the educational institutions of Canada have a profound effect upon the minorities within that system. As previously mentioned, minority groups are marginalized, made to feel invisible and invalid. Eurocentrism in schools has the power to disempower minorities and their potential voices and achievements. Literature that was specific to discussing relationships of power, voice and identity within these Eurocentric classrooms was difficult to find when related to minorities in general, unless research was focused upon looking at second language learners and second language theorists. Therefore, the following is a discussion of concepts found in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) literature that can be applied to minorities, whether they are second language speakers or not.

Cultural capital is “knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions” (Bourdieu, 1991). These can be concepts as simple as camping with family, eating certain western foods, or knowing popular books. Within SLA research, discussions surround this concept as being a hindrance of voice for second language immigrants to a nation. Cultural capital is found in every public place within Canada, and definitely found within

the classrooms and dialogues of schools within Canada. Minority backgrounds often do not provide the cultural capital that would allow students from a minority group to feel a part of the conversations. Thus, minority students become marginalized, and classrooms lose the valuable opportunities to be enriched by the knowledge and culture of these minority children and young adults.

In addition to lacking cultural capital, many second language learners feel a sense of illegitimacy over language. Their experiences lead them to doubt their own abilities to understand and to communicate and lead ultimately to a loss of confidence in terms of their feelings of worthiness to speak and have the power to impose reception. Bourdieu (1977) explains the power to impose reception, as a power where “those who speak regard those who listen as worthy to listen, and that those who listen regard those that speak as worthy to speak” (p. 648).

Research has shown that there is an ownership of English. A visible minority does not have the same ownership over the language as someone who is white. “In many English-speaking contexts, the ownership of English by white immigrants is contested to a significantly lesser degree than that by racialized newcomers” (Pavlenko and Norton, 2007, p.674). In Norton Peirce’s research, she has developed a theory of “social identity”; the theory “assumes that power relations play a crucial role in social interactions between language learners and target language speakers” (Norton Peirce, 1995, p.12). Minorities within Canada may not be the standard L2 learners in the typical sense; they may be born in Canada and may not have accents. They do not, however, visibly and internally fit the “true” Canadian mould. As an outsider to the “true” Canadian way, L2 students and minorities lack power and, therefore, lack voice. Many

minorities come to realize, like Mai, a Vietnamese immigrant to Canada in Norton's research (2000), that they will never be the "perfect Canadians." Even with university degrees or mastery over the language, the question is constantly posed: Will I have the power to impose reception and will I be seen as having something valid to say? Can minorities shake this foundation of doubt that has been created?

Critique of the Literature

In summary, the literature that surrounds the workings and failings of the practices and policies regarding diversity within the Canadian school system describes a history of discrimination, as well as new reforms that advocate for the diversity of the school system. The failings of these reforms are recognized, as is the deeply rooted Eurocentric world view that permeates the school environments. New multicultural policies are constantly being posed. In separate literature that focuses on second language learners, but aptly applies to minorities in general, it is recognized that the ability to impose reception and feelings of legitimacy over language are taken away in a Eurocentric system. The voices, identities, and potential of minorities are muted.

There were some major elements missing from this literature that will hopefully be addressed. First and foremost, multicultural policies were presented; however, research studies to show the effectiveness of these policies were not. What approaches are working and what are not? What programs have been successful? In addition, how are the minorities involved in these new approaches reacting and responding? Indeed, what is missing from the literature are the voices of minorities who are, in fact, the prime focus of the change that is being called for. Also missing from the discussion are the voices of the teachers. This raises the question: Are teachers aware of the systemic

discrimination and effects of Eurocentrism in the Canadian educational system? How do they value the policies of multiculturalism in their classrooms?

Finally, the literature available on minority identity in the classroom within Canada oftentimes relates to the Aboriginal minority groups. It is understandable that such a large focus is put on advocating for the Aboriginal community; however, Canada is increasingly multi-cultural. The numerous minority groups that make up the landscape of Canada also need to be addressed.

SECTION 3: CONNECTIONS TO PRACTICE

It has long been asserted that Canada is a rich tapestry of multiculturalism. It is a nation that acts as a supportive mosaic for a vastly diverse population, unlike its neighbour to the south that acts more as a melting pot of cultures. However, within the classrooms and educational institutions of this diverse nation, the mosaic is not being appreciated and valued. Instead, a pervasive Eurocentric curriculum and practice turn a blind eye to the diversity that surrounds it.

The voice of diversity is muted in classrooms. In every classroom there are students who dominate and guide classroom discussion and activities, while others passively sit in the background. Each child has something to say, and ideas, information, skills, and experiences to offer; however, every child is not using his/her voice. This classroom implementation plan is a response to those children whose voicelessness and passivity come from feelings of illegitimacy as minority speakers, and further responds to the role schools and set teaching practices have had in producing this struggle for voice in minorities. As we continue to refine and perfect our classroom practice, educators need to acknowledge the composition of their classrooms and their nation and teach students to value themselves and the diversity around them. It is hoped that the following is a tool that elementary school educators can and will use within their classrooms to begin to foster this change.

Overarching Goals

In order to implement a program of inclusiveness for diversity and create changes in the self-awareness, self-confidence, and empowerment of voice in the students who

participate in these inclusive practices a set of goals needs to be established. There are four goals that educators need to keep in mind in whatever program of cultural inclusiveness they are implementing: 1.) To improve self-confidence and self-awareness of the minority students in the classroom. 2.) To break down the separation of home and family within the school. 3.) To help minority students feel that their ideas, stories and histories are worthy of sharing, and encourage them to want to do so. 4.) To have non-minority students demonstrate an understanding, sensitivity and inclusive curiosity towards minority students in their class. Ultimately, the hope is that these goals and the following implementation plan and teaching strategies will be the stepping-stones towards creating change and combating the systemic Eurocentrism and biases present in the Canadian education system.

Becoming a Culturally Responsive Educator

The First Step

The first step in creating a culturally responsive program within your classroom is to recognize that you have been conditioned to teach in a Eurocentric manner, and to perpetuate the practices that have been taught to you. The way that you initially set up your classroom, how you communicate with your students, as well as the way you design and deliver your lessons, are all preset to a cultural conditioning. If an educator is able to recognize this, they can then begin to change it. Also, it is important, as a first step to set the goal explicitly—you wish to create a culturally responsive classroom environment, and to use inclusive methods of teaching to foster identities of confidence in your classroom. Letting your colleagues know your goal is a great idea. It holds you

accountable, and also may inspire interest in other colleagues so that this change becomes bigger than in just your one classroom.

Classroom Setup

Many elements of Cyndy Baskin's "inclusive schooling" concept are valuable in designing the initial setup of the classroom for implementing a culturally responsive curriculum. Baskin's "inclusive schooling" concept calls for representation of all students in the books, posters, texts, etc. that students are exposed to. Therefore, before the students even arrive in your classroom, make sure that the posters around the classroom represent diversity and the novels found in the classroom and that are chosen for study are representative of a variety of ethnic groups. It should be a central focus to bring in as many visual and textual representations of a variety of ethnic groups as possible. The classroom should be filled with resources that are about *and created by* the diverse cultures that represent the school. The bulletin boards can represent current news, as well as show photos of community leaders from culturally diverse backgrounds. *Table 1* provides a list of possible books that you may want to bring into your classroom. Also, librarians are great resources for helping you find a collection of books, as well as helping to pick novels for novel studies. As an advocate for culturally responsive teaching, you can encourage your librarian to focus on bringing in resources and novel sets that are representative of our multicultural nation.

When giving out assignments throughout the year, you should look for opportunities to use these diverse texts in your lessons. It is your job to try to use a variety of resources that represent the faces of your classroom wherever you can.

TABLE 1

Possible Reading Resources for the Classroom

Books that focus on Cultural Diversity, Multiculturalism, Prejudice, and Racism	
TITLES	TITLES
<p>Let's talk about race</p> <p>Celebrate! Connections among cultures</p> <p>Tailspinners: collection2</p> <p>Coming of age around the world: a multicultural anthology</p> <p>Tripper's travels: an international scrapbook</p> <p>Everybody brings noodles</p> <p>Everybody serves soup</p> <p>Everybody cooks rice</p> <p>Deogratias: a tale of Rwanda</p> <p>Little soldier</p> <p>A wind of change</p> <p>Song of Be</p> <p>Many stones</p> <p>Diamonds in the shadow</p> <p>Zulu dog</p> <p>The middle of somewhere: a story of South Africa</p> <p>The garbage king</p> <p>An eye for colour</p> <p>No tigers in Africa</p> <p>Chanda's secrets</p> <p>Crocodile burning</p> <p>Refugee boy</p> <p>Sosu's call</p> <p>My blue book</p> <p>Konnichiwa' I am a Japanese-American girl</p> <p>Behind the mask (Korea)</p> <p>The name jar (Korea to US)</p> <p>A song for Ba (china)</p> <p>The eye of the horse (India to England)</p> <p>Grandpa Chatterji (India to Great Britain)</p> <p>Rickshaw girl (Bangladesh)</p> <p>Child bride (china)</p> <p>Blue jasmine (India/US)</p> <p>Homeless world (India)</p> <p>Our new home: immigrant children speak</p> <p>The kids book of Black Canadian history</p> <p>Rapid Ray: the story of Ray Lewis (African Canadian)</p>	<p>The man who ran faster than everyone: the story of Tom Longboat (First Nations)</p> <p>The girl with a baby (First Nations)</p> <p>No two snowflakes (Canadian student writing to penpal in Ghana about snow)</p> <p>Abby's birds (Japanese-Canadian)</p> <p>Suki's kimono (Japanese-Canadian)</p> <p>Maya running (India)</p> <p>Stones (African Canadian)</p> <p>Bifocal (Muslim)</p> <p>A group of one (Indo-Canadian)</p> <p>Good for nothing (Metis)</p> <p>Yellow line (First Nations)</p> <p>Across the steel river (First Nations)</p> <p>Throwaway daughter (Chinese Canadian)</p> <p>The bone collector's son Chinese-Canadian)</p> <p>Shu-Li and Tamara (Chinese-Canadian)</p> <p>What happened this summer</p> <p>Eating stories: a Chinese Canadian & Aboriginal potluck</p> <p>Sumitra's story (East Indian experience in England)</p> <p>Running on eggs</p> <p>Figs and fate: stories about growing up in the Arab world today</p> <p>African American</p> <p>Black like Kyra, white like me (African American)</p> <p>The skin I'm in (African American)</p> <p>Witness (African American)</p> <p>Project Mulberry (Korean)</p> <p>Hold fast to dreams (African American)</p> <p>The road to Memphis (African American)</p> <p>The star fisher (Chinese American)</p> <p>Hidden roots (First Nations)</p> <p>Indian summer (First nations)</p>

Speakers and Volunteers

Within her “inclusive schooling” concept Baskin also suggests that people representative of the different backgrounds be invited into the class. You should utilize any opportunities you can to have speakers and teachers coming into the classroom that represent the diverse makeup of the classroom, school and nation. The families of your students are your best resource in beginning this process. To initiate this process, send home a survey to explain the goal of representativeness within your classroom, and to ask parents for their support, suggestions, and information on their backgrounds so that you are aware of what each family may potentially be able to offer throughout the year. Parents may offer your class the opportunity to hear their stories of migration to Canada, or they may want to come in to teach a crafts lesson on a traditional art project. The survey may simply discover what parents are available to come into the classroom and help on different occasions. Any participation is helpful to the culturally responsive program; as noted earlier, a goal is to break down the separation of home and family within the school. Students must feel that their families have a place in the educational institutions in which they are learning.

The teacher must, also, independently find scholars, storytellers, and other legitimate sources of knowledge that tie into the curriculum and learning that is going on in the classroom, and invite them into the classroom regularly. You may consider this to be a difficult task, however, it does become easier over time. Over the years, you will have established numerous contacts, and simply build upon what you have. You may only have 2 speakers come in the first year of implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy; however, in the years to come, you will build upon this.

Baskin also stresses the importance of diversifying staff to represent the students in the school. It is not possible for you to hire staff, however, volunteers can be asked to come into the classroom regularly. As noted above, these can be parent volunteers. Other members of the community that you know of may also come in.

General Considerations

There are numerous little things a teacher can implement that add up to creating a successfully inclusive and responsive classroom setting. It is recommended that teachers *take an interest in their students' lives outside of school*, and ask them questions about their cultures, traditions and community events (Lundgren & Lundy-Ponce, 2007). It is important to establish these connections, and seek out opportunities to do so. From these conversations, the teacher may also become more knowledgeable about the various cultures of their classroom. It is likely that you don't know everything about each child's culture, so this can be your opportunity to learn. From the information you gather, you may realize that you have assigned a certain test or project to be due on or the day after a religious or cultural holiday. You should *make sure to mark your calendar with these special days and plan around them* (Lundgren & Lundy-Ponce, 2007).

Also, teachers should *send home letters and materials in the first language of the families who are second language learners* and have less confidence in reading in English. Establishing contacts with persons who speak and write the various languages should be a goal; however, oftentimes, there are students in the class, or their parents, who can act as the translators.

A culturally responsive classroom is one in which educators *teach students that there are multiple ways of thinking, being and doing, and that it is important to open our*

minds to all ways. Therefore, to teach this, a teacher can explore the different ways that different themes that are important to and common in all cultures, such as the importance of families, migration, and friendships, are viewed and discussed (Lundgren & Lundy-Ponce, 2007). Or, the teacher may “use current world events to teach students to read, think and discuss from multiple perspectives”(Lundgren & Lundy-Ponce, 2007). Teachers can use the internet to see international perspectives on events, and discuss where students’ points of view might be coming from.

Lesson and Unit Ideas

The number of easy to implement and curriculum connected lesson and unit ideas for culturally responsive teaching are endless. Creating lessons that focus on the goals of a culturally responsive program oftentimes requires a subtle tweaking of lessons already being used, and at other times, are new lessons all together that add a layer of depth to your teaching and classroom environment. The general idea is to remember the goals, and use as many opportunities to achieve these as possible. *50 Strategies for Culturally Responsive Teaching, K-8*, by Patricia Ruggiano Schmidt and Wen Ma (2006) is an excellent resource that gives easy to implement and well laid out lesson ideas for the classroom. The following website, <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/20746>, also has a number of great ideas for implementing culturally responsive teaching practices into the classroom. In the following section, there are a few lessons and unit ideas for easy implementation that can get you started in your culturally responsive classroom. The lesson ideas have been derived from Schmidt and Ma’s teaching resource.

Getting to Know Yourself and Your Peers.

Task or Assignment: Students are often asked to complete “All about me” tasks or autobiographical projects at the beginning of the year. It is a common practice amongst teachers, and an example of culturally responsive teaching that you likely already do. Oftentimes, however, the getting to know you and your peers process is left at the beginning of the school year and not touched on again. There are numerous ways of keeping this theme going throughout the school year.

In the Primary Grades.

Autobiographies: Have students create mini booklets about themselves. Students can draw pictures of the things they like and dislike, of their families and of their friends. Have students present these books and explain their pictures to their classmates.

Another approach could be to have students fill a brown bag up of their favourite things from home, and come in and share them with their peers. It is a good idea to have only one or two students present a day so that each child has a chance to feel proud of the things they have brought. Encourage students to bring in pictures, and cultural artifacts if they have them.

Biographies: Instead of having students present about themselves, have them present about their peers. In this lesson, students can interview one another. This helps students appreciate one another, and get to know each other. Buddies will interview each other, then draw pictures of each buddy doing something that they like. The buddies can then report out to the class about the pictures they have drawn, and tell their peers about their buddies. Again, this is something that can be ongoing throughout the year. Once the pictures have been presented, put them up on a bulletin board for students to go back

to and look at.

Physical differences: Studies have shown that children are very aware of what is acceptable in society. They are aware of the fact that European or White skinned people are given a better chance (Schmidt & Ma, 2006). As a result, it is important to focus on the diversity of the students, and to make the physical differences explicit so that open and explorative conversations can occur that help the students to accept themselves and others around them. Before any lesson that looks at the physical differences of the students in the classroom occurs, teachers need to guide students to be sensitive. Next, the teacher helps students to brainstorm all the diverse possibilities for physical differences. People can be tall and short, have many skin colours, hair colours and eye colours. After this is done, the teacher explains to the students that although people have all these differences we can all still work together cooperatively and be friends. The students can then draw self-portraits that highlight their own unique qualities proudly. This lesson can be conducted with intermediate students as well. A possibility is to integrate it with a math unit on graphing, and have students survey these physical differences and graph them.

In the Intermediate Grades.

Autobiographies: Students in the intermediate grades can take the former lessons a step further. Autobiographies can be presented in many ways. One example would be to have students create their own personal timelines of their lives. They can place significant events and memories along the line. Photographs and pictures can be added to the timeline to illustrate events, and positive events can be placed above the line, while sad or low events can be placed below the line. A second example of an autobiographical

project for the intermediate grades is one where students are asked to write their own autobiographies, beginning from their earliest memories. Students can include family, history, education, religion, holidays and other celebrations. Finally, just as the primary students brought in some of their favourite things from home, the intermediate students can do the same, however, try to encourage the object to be some sort of family artifact that the students then write about or present to the classroom. Students can discuss where the artifact comes from, and why it is important to him/herself and his/her family.

Biographies: The biography project in the intermediate grade is simply a step up from that of the primary grades. Students partner up and conduct interviews with a partner. Before this, however, the teacher should explain the interview process with students, and with the class brainstorm a list of interview questions. Once students have conducted interviews, they can then turn those interviews into paragraphs with illustrations that are posted on the class bulletin.

Family Histories: Another semi-autobiographical project that the students may wish to engage in is an exploration into their own pasts. The make up of Canada is very unique. All of us have a unique history of how we became a part of the Canadian landscape. In this project, students are asked to share their own personal narratives. In the lead up to the project parents, community members, and various representatives of as many cultures as possible should be invited into the classroom to share their narratives. Students will be able to engage with their families and build great home-school connections. It is a great project for the students and for their families.

Literacy Learning.

Literature is the easiest way to bring cultures into the classroom. The following are a few

lessons that use books and storytelling as modes to building a culturally responsive classroom.

In the Primary Grades.

Storytelling: In this lesson, the students are asked to read one multicultural or folklore book that is available in the classroom. After they have read their own book, they work within a small group where they share about the book they have read, and the culture they have learned about. When the students retell the story, they can be asked to use drama to act out the story, or use the pictures in the story to help guide their telling of the tale.

Celebrating Famous People from Diverse Backgrounds: The teacher will choose a piece of historical fiction, biographies or biographical storybooks to read to, or with, the class. After, students will retell the story of the person. This can be taken further, and turned into a project unit; after learning about each new person, the students can create a class storybook about these people. Each student would draw a picture and write a few sentences about him/her. This could then be bound and left in the classroom to be read by classmates, or be taken home to read and discuss with families. This lesson will show diverse role models to your students. Some examples are: *Mary Anning and the Sea Dragon*, *Starry Messenger*, *Wilma Unlimited*, *My dream of Martin Luther King*, *Diego Rivera*, *Sacajawea*, and *Girl Wonder: A Baseball Story in Nine Innings*.

In the Intermediate Grades.

Storytelling: Similar to the primary students, teachers will ask students to read a multicultural book. The students will then write down a brief outline of what they have just read. After, they can present what they have learned in a creative and imaginative

way. This may be through art, drama, or powerpoint. The choice is theirs. Teachers should encourage students to be as creative as possible; try not to limit themselves to using a piece of poster paper, and simply writing out a plot summary with pictures.

Celebrating People from Diverse Backgrounds: The lesson for primary students applies to the intermediate grades as well, however, there are some elements that can be added on; after reading, or being read to, students may take the information they have gotten about this famous person and reenact his/her life story to the class. Also, students should be encouraged to talk about how they are similar to these people and their stories, experiences, or dreams.

Primary and Intermediate Grades.

Appreciation of the Arts: The arts are often used to teach students about culture. Classroom teachers can work with the art, music, and/or drama teachers within their schools or with local musicians, and artists. Students can and will be inspired by seeing and listening to these artistic examples, and consider their own talents and possibilities. There are numerous ways of creating an appreciation for the arts and various cultures that are represented within them. Teachers must search to find what their community has to offer his/her classroom; there may be local theatre groups who would be willing to come into the classroom to demonstrate and teach miming, or other forms of acting. Local dancers from various ethnic backgrounds may come in to do performances and even teach different dance steps, while teaching students about the various types of music that is heard around the world.

SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

The process of writing this major paper has been a wonderful experience for me. I have had the opportunity to truly explore myself as an individual and as a teacher, and found a topic of interest that is very close to my heart. From this paper, I learned the true depth to the Eurocentric curriculum that is being taught in so many classrooms, and the very subtle ways in which, even I was perpetuating this learning experience. I also discovered that change can be implemented, and for it to be implemented, I first had to find a voice to speak for the change. I have found my voice in this paper, and plan to continue to use it as I bring culturally responsive teaching practices to my own classroom, and help influence other educators around me to do the same. The steps to opening up your classroom to diversity are not complicated. There is some work in the implementation of the change, however, the rich conversation and community of the classroom makes the work worthwhile.

I feel a deep sense of pride now, in a classroom that is centered by an open heart, and curious mind. In our classroom, the walls are filled with decorations inspired by the voices of our class. Art projects, photographs, and stories on the walls tell anyone who enters, that we are proud of who we are, and where we come from. They tell our visitors that we are all very unique, and diverse, and that this diversity is respected and appreciated. In our classroom, you hear the voices of my students, of all of my students; those with learning disabilities, those who are shy, those who are new to Canada and speak little or no English, and those who are curious to know more about their neighbours. In discussions, we learn about the customs, traditions, and backgrounds of one another. We have learned to be open to new ways of doing things and to new ideas. We have been taught, instead of judging, to ask questions when we do not understand. We have learned to appreciate the accents, the colours, and the customs of our school family. In our classroom, the doors are open to the families and community, and from them, we have created a deeper layer of richness to our learning. Parents and community members have taught us traditional stories from many cultures, and told us the stories of how they came to be Canadian. They have shared their songs, their dance, their customs, and explained the meanings behind them. In our classroom, everyone has a voice.

I have found my voice.

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