Creating a Developmental Education Curriculum for Student Success with Diverse Cultures

Abstract

A sense of belonging and community support is extremely important to college student success. Both engender the kind of systems thinking students need to excel in the university. This is especially true for developmental education students who must take a non-credit bearing class, or classes, in addition to the standard requirements for their degree. These classes provide obstacles to student motivation in the way they impose an added financial burden and also come with the stigma of remediation. One of the most effective ways to foster a sense of belonging and offer community support is through a practice of culturally sensitive pedagogy. This project looks to answer the question **"How does an instructor create a welcoming and equitable developmental education curriculum for students of diverse cultures, and to what extent are Texas State University developmental education instructors implementing those measures?"** By combining a literary analysis and qualitative data from learning environment observations of Texas State University developmental education reading classes, an evaluation of useful practices for student success is offered in our results.

Systems Thinking Connection

Every university is a system that requires a process of thinking different from those that most students possess when they enter the institution. Multicultural developmental education students require more support in changing their thinking process than other incoming students due to varied lived and educational experiences, and possible language barriers. This support needs to be tailored to the culture(s) of the students for maximum effectiveness in their transition. Our project investigates wise practices in offering this support, compares different literary sources to see how many of the practices they advise, and observes developmental education classes at Texas State University to evaluate how many of the wise practices are implemented. This evaluation of practices and whether or not they are implemented will suggest ways that we can help multicultural developmental education students adjust their systems thinking when we encounter these students in the future.

Theoretical Framework

Aceves & Orosco (2014) presented a model that included fourteen very comprehensive aspects for what they term culturally responsive teaching (CRT). It was used as the framework for evaluating the classroom observations and the other journal articles on multicultural developmental education pedagogy included in this project.

Instructional Engagement/Culture, Language, and Racial Identity: Instructional engagement and culture, language, and racial identity both work to create a pedagogy where students' "relevant schemas, background knowledge, and home languages" are used to develop a "critical understanding of how students' cultural, linguistic, and racial identities develop and how these constructs impact learning" (Aceves & Orosco, 2014, p. 9, p. 10).

Multicultural Awareness: Multicultural awareness requires teachers to "objectively examine their own cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions" (Aceves & Orosco, 2014, p. 10).

High Expectations: High expectations is a theme common in developmental education as well as CRT. As such, it was not mentioned much in the articles examined for this literature synthesis.

Critical Thinking: Critical thinking is also an important aspect of developmental education. However, for CRT it also integrates "students' cultural and linguistic experiences with challenging learning experiences involving higher order thinking and critical inquiry" (Aceves & Orosco, 2014, p. 11).

Social Justice: Social justice is an important theme for any classroom, but with CRT it provides an "active process for students to seek out information about what is happening in the communities around them, which guides them to better understandings of and better solutions for the inequities encountered in their communities" (Aceves & Orosco, 2014, p. 12).

Collaborative Teaching: Collaborative teaching, according to Aceves & Orosco (2014), is a practice whereby instructors offer a "common introduction to lessons and then distribute[s] learning assignments based on students' academic skills" (p. 13).

Responsive Feedback: Responsive feedback is a second aspect of this model that should be common in all classrooms, not just developmental education. However, the instructor must tailor feedback to align with the diverse cultures present in their students.

Modeling: Modeling is another common pedagogical tool, but in a CRT classroom it also must be tailored to students' "cultural, linguistic, and lived experiences" (Aceves & Orosco, 2014, p. 15).

Instructional Scaffolding: Instructional scaffolding is also common in all higher education classrooms, although Aceves & Orosco (2014) expand it to include "promot[ing] a deeper level of understanding using students' contributions and their cultural and linguistic backgrounds" (p. 16).

Problem Solving: Problem solving is something all college students should learn from their time in university, and what better place to learn it than the developmental education classroom, where they are already being taught basic skills for collegiate success.

Child-Centered Instruction: Child-centered instruction prompts instructors to develop "culturally responsive learning opportunities and outcomes focused on student-generated ideas, background knowledge, values, communication styles, and preferences" (p. 18).

Assessments: Different cultural experiences provide different strengths and weaknesses on assessments. Aceves & Orosco (2014) prompt instructors to "select informal measures and assessment procedures and formal (i.e., standardized) assessments that consider students' linguistic and cultural identities" (p. 19).

Materials: Aceves & Orosco (2014) ask instructors to "integrate research-developed and teacher-selected materials that validate and consider students' cultural, linguistic, and racial identities" (p. 20).

Aspect of CRT	Observation #1	Observation #2
Instructional Engagement	13/13 students	11/12 students
Culture, Language, and Racial Identity	13/13 students	12/12 students
Multicultural Awareness	13/13 students	12/12 students
High Expectations	13/13 students	12/12 students
Critical Thinking	8/13 students	12/12 students
Social Justice	13/13 students	12/12 students
Collaborative Teaching	13/13 students	12/12 students
Responsive Feedback	13/13 students	12/12 students
Modeling	6/13 students	12/12 students
Instructional Scaffolding	6/13 students	12/12 students
Problem Solving	8/13 students	12/12 students
Child-Centered Instruction	0/13 students	12/12 students
Assessments	13/13 students	12/12 students
Materials	13/13 students	12/12 students

Aceves & Orosco	Banks, Bruch, Higbee, & Britt Lundell	Behrens	Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard, & Moore-Cherry	Bruch, Jehangir, Jacobs, & Ghere	Carriuolo, Rodgers, & Stout	Coleman, DeLong, Sheerin DeVore, Gibney, & Kuhne	Cook-Sather	Higbee	Higbee, Bruch, Jehangir, Britt Lundell, & Miksch	Oldfield
Instructional Engagement	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
Culture, Language, and Racial Identity	X		X	X	X	X			X	
Multicultural Awareness	X		X	X	X			X	X	
High Expectations		X		X					X	
Critical Thinking	X		X	X		X		X	X	
Social Justice	X			X		X				
Collaborative Teaching	X		X	X						X
Responsive Feedback		X		X					X	
Modeling		X							X	
Instructional Scaffolding	X		X	X					X	
Problem Solving	X		X	X		X			X	
Child-Centered Instruction			X					X		
Assessments	X		X					X	X	
Materials	X		X	X					X	

Presenters

Jayson Guest
   MA in Rhetoric and Composition
   Department of English
Maisha Farzana Mumu
   MA in Developmental Ed - Learning Support
   Department of Curriculum & Instruction

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