The culture space in the education classroom

Teachers’ perspectives

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Background: the issue

- Curriculum is culturally irrelevant
Background: Data Collection

Part 1
Findings

- Culture and identity in the midst of diversity
- Local/global dichotomy/continuum
- Temporality (past/present/future orientation)
- Student-centeredness
- Teacher competence
- Curriculum design and support structures
The issue

- Teachers had not been consulted
- A larger group (ECCE, primary and secondary teachers)
Research questions

- What is the extent of agreement between teachers and other stakeholders in society regarding the culture curriculum nexus?
- What examples of students’ culture do teachers suggest for curriculum development?
- What significant issues must be considered when developing culturally relevant curricula in the context of Trinidad and Tobago?
Colonialism, neo colonialism and post colonialism (Childs & Williams, 1997; Dei & Kempf, 2006; Yazzie, 1999)
Cultural retentions (Warner-Lewis, 1991)
Identity (Fanon, 1963; Yazzie, 1999)
Psycho- affective motivations (Fanon)
Third-space approach (Lipka et al, 2005)
Questionnaire

- A suitable data collection strategy
Issues

- Item type - closed Likert type (Gift, 2009) or open-ended items (Lederman et al, 2002)
- Summative score? combining unrelated items into a single total is unjustified psychometrically (Osborne et al cited by Tzu-Ling & Berlin, 2010)
- Validity issues
Lederman et al (2000, p.336), in discussing the development and validation of the SPI inventory, “the validation of SPI was achieved in the usual manner for such instruments: literature review, devising a model, employing the judgments of experts, getting feedback from pilot studies, and testing the instrument’s ability to distinguish among different groups of respondents.”
Related to research on views of NOS, Lederman et al (2002) advocate a method of validating such instruments through the use of interviews to probe responses to open-ended questionnaire items.
Questionnaire format

Decisions

- Mix of closed Likert type and open-ended
- No summative score required
- Use of empirical data, peer review, issues in the literature, pilot and revise.
Procedure

- Develop questionnaire
- Peer review
- Pilot questionnaire
- Revise based on feedback
- Distribute to wider sample of teachers for completion
- Analyse responses
- Interview with selected teachers
Data collection

- Pilot group (primary and secondary teachers)
  - Group of 18 teachers involved in the MEd programme
Data collection cont’d

- Live groups
  - MEd group (35 students: primary and sec)
  - Dip Ed Trinidad (66); Dip Ed Tobago (9)
  - BEd (level 3; 27: primary and ECCE)

- Interviews with 8 of 13 Dip Ed T’dad students (who consented to participate if required)
Research Question 1

RQ 1: What is the extent of/areas of agreement between teachers and stakeholders in society regarding the culture curriculum nexus?
Generally there was high agreement of these teachers with the themes developed from the previous focus groups.

- 84% felt that culturally relevant curricula should be included in the content of all schools.
- Only 44% agreed that alternative type schools were required.
Statistical analysis

- Principal components – 12 factors
- Re-run analysis with forced factor of 5
- 53% variance
Focus on outcomes/future orientation - 14 items, e.g.

- prepare students for independent behaviour
- prepare students for the adult world
- include global issues/scenarios
Lived experience – 9 items

- address students’ backgrounds
- include assessment tasks that are related to students’ culture
- relate to students’ home life
Content – 10 items

- Culturally relevant curricula can be developed for language arts
- Culturally relevant curricula can be developed for physical education
- Curriculum can be simultaneously of a high academic standard and culturally relevant
Standards – 5 items

- a national curriculum cannot be culturally relevant
- a curriculum that is culturally relevant will restrict students from participation on the global stage
- alternative schools should be established to deliver culturally relevant curricula
Conceptual/Philosophical – 3 items

- “whose culture?”
- “relevant to whom?”
- there is a difference between a curriculum that is relevant and one that is culturally relevant
• ANOVA showed no differences between groups
• Correlation showed some positive relationship among the groups
Most teacher respondents were in general agreement with views expressed by other stakeholders - concerned citizens, artists, academics, and curriculum officers.

There was general agreement also between different groups of teachers on culturally relevant curriculum.
Research Question 2

What examples of students’ culture do teachers suggest as useful for curriculum development?
Findings 2

- Responses to item: State 3 cultural beliefs or practices which you think can impact on the teaching/learning interface
- A significant number of respondents omitted the item as follows:
  - MEd: 60%
  - Dip Ed T’dad: 59%
  - Dip Ed T’go: 33%
  - BEd: 48%
Findings 2

- Traditional practices/beliefs
  - It’s not that simple, but identity, heritage and music/folklore/art/religions/diversity to appreciate inclusion and one-ness (Dip Ed T’dad No. 19)
  - Food fallacies in the Caribbean- difficult to dispel wrong beliefs e.g. green bananas contain iron (Dip Ed T’dad No. 42)
  - Sou Sou (Dip Ed T’dad No 61)
Findings 2

Traditional practices/beliefs

- Tobago Heritage Festival; Carnival (costuming and calypsos); superstition (deleted) (Dip Ed T’go No. 4)
- calypso music, festivals, reinventing old time activities (BEd No. 4)
- Traditional methods (BEd No. 22)
- Festivals and religious practices
  - fasting; prayer (Dip Ed T’dad No 34)
Findings 2

- Contemporary culture
  - Digital culture among youths allow them to learn differently; Students are more outspoken about their beliefs (Dip Ed T’dad No 51)
Beliefs about students and student learning

- All children can learn; children learn differently; children learn by doing (MEd No 24)
- Children must listen to learn; the best teacher is experience; common sense come before book sense (MEd No 29)
- Students are passive learners; talk/chalk, lecture type teaching strategies; traditional forms of assessment- paper and pencil tests. (MEd No 10)
Findings 2

- **Social values**
  - children from lower social background cannot succeed; academic studies unimportant as not everyone will get work; curriculum is not relevant to needs of students. (MEd No. 30)
What significant issues must be considered when developing culturally relevant curricula in the context of Trinidad and Tobago?
Findings

Teachers’ personal bias

- The results revealed that the issue of Carnival is controversial and its selection for inclusion in culturally relevant curriculum is based on personal biases. For example, one said
  - “I am not in favour of it because of what pertains. Do they really need to know about this?”
- Another member of the focus group intervened to state
  - “But education is about choice. They must be provided with information and allowed to make a choice.”
- Another respondent summed up this attitude in the following manner “Carnival has its detractors”
Findings

Inability to articulate views

- Two persons indicated the challenge experienced as they tried to express their ideas about culture and curriculum. They stated respectively
  - “It is difficult to verbalize”
  - “I did not get to formulate an answer”
Teacher uncertainty: The role of cultural beliefs

- The culturally relevant curriculum should include examples of students’ cultural beliefs but
  - “it would not make much of a difference in students’ performance if it [cultural beliefs] was not included.” She felt that there was a need to include it, but not really sure. She felt that the students’ mindset was on passing exams whether they could relate to the concepts or not.
Discussion

- Issues of levels of cultural retention
- Issues of confidence in revealing cultural beliefs which might be perceived as of low culture or indigenous culture
- Review of some items to determine validity - whether they assess what they are meant to assess
The way forward

- Interviews to be held with teachers to clarify views expressed on the written questionnaire.
- Interviews to be held with teachers of subjects within focus group sessions to determine their views on developing culturally relevant curricula with specific examples identified.
References


