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# An investigation into the kinds of innovative pedagogies involving apprenticeship learning groups and multiliteracies which support learning in culturally diverse classrooms in Johannesburg and the relationship between these pedagogies and the implementation of Curriculum 2005.

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## 5.2. Gender Relations

### 5.2.1. Claim

Learners in single gender ALGs at this level find it easier to work together because they are comfortable with each other and understand each other better. However, they are inclined to perpetuate sexist preconceptions and produce texts which are in my opinion less rich and diverse than mixed gender ALGs.

Learners who work in mixed gender ALGs can develop mutual respect and productive working relationships, but when allowed to select their own groups, they often revert to homogeneous groups which they find more safe and comfortable.

### 5.2.2. Implications for teaching.

The gender composition of ALGs must be thought out carefully in relation to what the teacher wants to achieve with the ALGs. If the teacher wants to engender confidence and draw a learner out then a single gender ALG is recommended. For example, when Leigh was placed with the two boys in Cycle 3 his performance and confidence improved no end. All members of that ALG agreed that they worked well together because they were all boys and therefore understood each other and one another's needs. Gabrielle was able to identify with Leigh's 'need for a little discipline' which all members of the group agreed girls wouldn't understand.

> We tell Leigh to go eat when he gets home and then do the work, don't go play in the street, because we know sometimes we also feel lazy.

The danger of single gender groups is that it entrenches sexist perspectives. For example Gabrielle's group was convinced:

> Girls are usually more hardworking than boys!

On the other hand, by mixing groups in terms of gender, I was able to witness a temporary shift in attitudes of the learners involved to the opposite sex to the extent that they demonstrated mutual respect and productive working relationships. I was, however, not able to see the learners actually select mixed gender groups. They always reverted to the homogenous groups which they found more comfortable. For

attitude change to take place I suggest that this kink of work needs to be part of much larger holistic complexes of processes to shift both gender and racial stereotypes.

Having said this, the change in attitude and working relationships only occurred under the right conditions and with the right mix of personalities. For example, after breaking through his initial resistance it was successful to an extent in Martin's first group. (See Chap 4 cycle 2) However he still reverted to an all boys group when given the choice in cycle 6. Thokozani, on the otherhand was resistant to working with the girls throughout despite the fact that his marks improved so much.

Piaget (1977:165) states that only when children are able to 'discuss problems as equals are they likely to take into account new ways of thinking'. Vygotsky (1978) on the other hand believes that partnews are not equal but the inequality is in skills and understanding rather than power. I suggest that the different responses to the mixed groups was because the relationships between the personalities in Martin's group were such that power relations were equal. In Thokozani's group the power relationships were unequal as the girls took on the role of 'policewoman' and did not give Thokozani credit for being able to function without 'bullied'.

For ALGs to be successful in closing the gap between the sexes, it is important to carefully select personalities which are compatible and which can work productively together. It is also important for the teacher to be sensitive as to when one should persevere with a particular group arrangement and when the group arrangement is counter-productive and should be changed personalities which can work productively together.

## 5.3 Issues of Race

### 5.3.1. Claim

Learners generally find working in mixed race groups uncomfortable at first because of preconceived ideas created by home pressure, the apartheid legacy, the fact that they feel safe in monocultural settings and historical attitudes which are hard to shift.

Placing learners in mixed race ALGs does open the doors for dialogue and appreciation of what learners from different languages, histories and backgrounds bring to the ALG. More mature learners are better able to change attitudes than younger learners who given the choice revert to single race groups which they find easier to deal with.

5.3.2. Implications for teaching.

In both age groups there was a conspicous lack of racial mix in groups which were self selected even though overt race relations in both classes were good. That is to say, there were no instances of learners of different racial groups refusing to sit next to one another and there was no racial tension in the form of negative racial comments made by the learners in these classes as I have been witness to in other classes in the past. However, when groups were mixed there was tentative resistance. It seems that the learners had different expectstions of what each 'strange' learner would brind to the group in terms of level or type of work. For example, in cycle 2 Sibongile, a black girl, displayed a level of distrust and insecurity about working with Martin, a white boy, because she said:

> I didn't know how Martin would work.

Martin was resistant initially because he said he had

> different ideas about how it should be written.

However, they managed to negotiate an approach to the task which produced a rich and interesting textual product at the end of the cycle. Nevertheless, even though they had established a productive working relationship, when allowed to choose their own groups in cycle 6 they all reverted to same race groups. My hope is that eventually, if given the opportunity to work regularly in mixed race ALGs, the racial divide will disappear, but this may take some time.

In cycle 4 RS3, a white girl, was resistant to working with Claude and Sivuyile, both black boys, and did not understand at first that they were contributing to the process.

> I felt that any input into the poem was going to be only mine.

It was only when they were well under way with the project that she grudgingly admitted that they indeed had a lot to offer and in fact allowed them to produce the final text.

> Sivuyile asked lots of question and insisted on compiling the final product. He had lots of ideas about turning the images into pictures. I thought that was a very good thing, so I eventually gave him my bit and let him put it all together. Claude at first just wrote down everything we said in class, but when it came to dividing the work for homework he did his bit. I received a lot more creative ideas and a lot more input than I would have been able to come up with on my own. I was very surprised.

Her surprise at their competence reflects her initial racial prejudice. However, once they had worked together she was more willing to work with learners of other races and later stated that the most interesting parts of the project was getting to know the learners of other races in her class. Because the mixing of race groups in the Grade 11 class resulted in more willingness to work together than in the Grade 9 class, I suggest that maturity plays a role in learners moving out of comfort zones.

According to Lave and Wegner (1991) conceiving of learning in terms of participation focuses attention on ways in which it is 'an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations.' I believe therefore that if learners of different races are placed together in ALGs on an ongoing basis, relationships between learners of differnt racial groups will evolve. I suggest that teachers should therefore persevere with mixed race ALGs and not become despondant if learners do not immediately show a change in racial attitudes. The same can be said of changing race relations in South Africa in the context of our histry of division and mistrust among different race groups.

### 5.4.1. The negative and positive effects of friendship in ALGs

#### 5.4.1. Claim

Allowing learners to work in ALGs that contain their friends can have a positive effect on learning as learners understand each other better and are more comfortable. The affective filters are therefore lowered which facilitates learning.

Conversely, working with friends can be disruptive if the friends are not motivated to learn as this creates peer pressure on the learner which inhibits learning. In addition,

when working with friends there may be a lack of diversity of thought in the sense that attitudes, ideas and difference have been 'smoothed out' in the ALG which would lead to less rich and interesting textual products.

5.4.2. Implications for teaching.

When setting up ALGs it is important that learners in the ALGs are operating in the same zone of proximal development so that they can understand each other. If this is the case the chances are that even if they are not friends initially, friendships will form. More importantly, they will understand each other and therefore be able to mediate in the learning task.

Jon is cycle 2 pointed out the importance of friendships in group work. He said:

> But it was also maar better with my friends because we understand each other ... but you can also maar say its worse because they like to fool around ... but there is sometimes they really work.

He clearly points out the advantages and disadvantages of working with friends in a group. They understand each other better, but at the same time they can disrupt his learning by 'fooling around'.

When Martin chose to work with his friends in cycle 6 they worked effectively and co-operatively and they produced an excellent model. However, the textual product produced lacked any other dimension. There were no words involved in the product. This shows also that working with friends may improve the working relationship, but the lack of diversity in the ALG may result in less rich and interesting textual products.

5.5. Importance of task selection in relation to group selection.

5.5.1. Claim.

It is not only the composition of the group that results in sucessful learning and attitude change, but it is the alignment between the combination of literacies collectively possessed by the group and the combination of modalities required by the task which results in productive diversity.

5.5.2.Implications for teaching.

In order to juggle these variables successfully, the teacher needs first and foremost to get to know her learners so that groups can be arranged productively. The teacher also needs to spend a lot of time planning which group arrangement will not only suit the class he or she is teaching, but match the group arrangement to the task at hand.

When a task calls for multimodal skills, then the group should contain diverse learners who possess different intelligences, skills and resources that can be shared. This is the case when the task is a portfolio group task containing subtasks which require different literacies. For example if a class is studying earthquakes each group may be asked to produce a video, an audiotape, a set of graphs, and a report on the causes and effects of earthquakes. In this case each group would need at least one learner who can help the other members of the group with each task. Should there be groups which do not possess a particular literacy it is important for the teacher to build in programmes to develop this literacy.

This was the case in cycle 2 when learners were required to produce the front page of the newspaper. It called on learners to use a computer to produce the text, to be able to draw in order to produce the cartoon, to have a sense of the spatial to arrange the text and the ability to write using the newspaper genre in order to produce the news reports. Martin owned a computer and was able to use the computer and to draw, so he contributed in these areas in terms of providing the resource of the computer as well as his intelligences and skills. Sibongile was able to write using the newspaper genre and Sylvia contributed in terms of the spatial as she arranged the front page.

Generally speaking I would recommend that learning tasks be designed in such a way that a variety of intelligences or literacies are required to complete the task. These diverse intelligences or literacies need to match those possessed by the diverse members of the group so that each member of the group has an opportunity to display their worth as an 'expert' in their own field. It is in this way that we achieve productive diversity. If the task includes subtasks which call for, amongst others, computer literacy, oral literacy, print literacy, visual literacy, spatial literacy etc. there is a good chance that there will be at least one task that each learner in the diverse

group can contribute to or which the group can work together on to produce meaning through Distributed Cognition. The group is therefore essential to meaning making.

The Multiliteracies approach involves an emphasis on learners working with texts and discourses in a range of media, and from a range of cultures. In so doing it is proposed that learners will develop a *critical metalanguage for talking about and understanding the social and cultural power* of these texts and their affiliated social practices. Meaning is also produced and distributed through the *activity* of negotiation and discussion in the group. According to Hutchins (1995:13) the emphasis on finding and describing knowledge structures that are somewhere inside the individual encourages us to overlook the fact that human cognition is always situated in a complex sociocultural world and cannot be unaffected by it. *Distributed Cognition* means that cognition is not to be found within the head only; rather cognition is distributed over other people and tools. People think 'in conjunction and partnership with others and with the help of culturally provided tools and implements' (Salomon, 1993:12).

Learning tasks that include the use of the computer, filming, drawing, acting, speaking, writing, creating models, posters etc to form a type of group portfolio can result in productive diversity, where all members of the group are empowered because they can make meaning through the mode in which they are most comfortable. The result is that not only their perceptions of themselves can change, but the other learners' perception of them can change and these two can feed one another and result in more confident and therefore more productive learners who are more willing to take risks.

## 5.6. The relationship between these ALG/Multiliteracies based Pedagogies and Outcomes based education.

In the process of applying an ALG/Multiliteracies approach to produce the above findings, I believe that I was at the same time, demonstrating all the generic outcomes required by Curriculum 2005. According to curriculum 2005 the generic or critical outcomes that need to be demonstrated in the classroom are as follows:

5.6.1. Identify and solve problems in which responses display that responsible decisions, using critical and creative thinking, have been made.

5.6.2. Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, community.

5.6.3. Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively.

5.6.4. Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information.

5.6.5. Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation.

5.6.6. Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others.

5.6.7. Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

The various cycles in this research project succeeded in demonstrating all of these outcomes in the following ways.

5.6.1. Identify and solve problems in which responses display that responsible decisions, using critical and creative thinking, have been made.

This was done in all six cycles. For example in cycle one the learners had to make meaning out of the poems that they were allocated before they could produce the posters. In cycle 2 learners had to solve many problems including what constituted a headline story from the novel, how to concert the genre of the novel into that of the newspaper, etc. Cycle 3 involved learners solving problems constantly as they worked in apprenticeship groups over a long period. Cycle 4 required learners to solve the problem of what there central themes of the poems were and how to convert the meaning of the poems into pictures. Cycle 5 required learners extracting the necessary information for the essay and arranging this logically in the form of al essay. Cycle 6 required learners solving the problem of converting information acquired about their topic into a visual text.

5.6.2. Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, community.

The focus of this research report is on the complexity of managing and working in groups. In all cycles except cycle six learners needed to work effectively as members of a team. In most cases this was effective, but this required careful planning of the part of the teacher. ( See 5.1 - 5.6.)

5.6.3. Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively.

In order to complete any of the tasks successfully in the research project learners needed to organise and manage themselves and the activities responsibly and effectively. In fact, in the case of the group work in general, learners who took over a leadership role had to not only manage themselves, but had to manage members of their group effectively in order to complete the group task.

5.6.4. Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information.

This type of activity was required in all cycles as it is a basic requirement of the Multiliteracies Pegagogy. Before learners can begin the process of shaping emergent meaning that involves re-presentation and recontextualisation, they must collect the necessary information. The re-presentation and recontextualisation process of necessity requires the analysis, organisation and critical evaluation of the information collected. This never involves a repetition of original information collected or 'The Available Design' . Every moment of meaning involves the transformation of the available resources of meaning. Reading, writing, seeing, listening and drawing are all instances of Designing. This process of redesigning which demonstrates this outcome was not seen in cycle 1 as the learners mostly reproduced their line by line explanations of the poems from study guides and reproduced them exactly as they had done in the past. However, when it came to cycle 2, 4, and 6 it may be clearly seen that information was transformed in this way to produce the texts.

These texts are good examples of how meaning making has remade itself and a new meaning-making resource has been produced.

5.6.5. Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation.

In each of the cycles in order to redesign the available design into the redesigned learners have communicated using visual, oral and written presentation. This can be seen in all texts described in the research.

5.6.6. Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others.

Science and technology in the form of the computer was used in the newspaper text. The Multiliteracies approach requires the used of technology in order for learners to keep up with the pace of 'fast capitalism'. Learners who created the three-dimensional models also made use of technology in order to create their models.

5.6.7. Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

Allowing learners to work as members of groups or teams on multimodal tasks provides a problem-solving context which is not in isolation. They are able to understand that the world is a set of related systems because, not only do all members of the group have to contribute in order for the project to succeed, but the different technology they employ must function effectively. In addition time limits must be met as is one member does not produce their contribution other members work is delayed, amongst other things. For example, creating the front page of the newspaper required a number of different problem solving tasks which were inter-related. There was the relationship between the stories in the newspaper and the plot of the novel; the relationship between the headline story and the cartoon etc. For the project to be successful learners had to understand the relationship between the systems involved as part of the problem solving exercise.

I therefore conclude that the ALG/Multiliteracies approach supports OBE in that the adoption of this approach results in the demonstration of the critical outcomes required by Curriculum 2005. Of the basis of the data collected in this research

project, this approach may also be said to support the learning of diverse groups of learners in the field of literature of the novel and poetry.

5.7 Conclusion.

Work with ALGs draws heavily on an understanding of a number of theorists' work. Vygotsky's work on the social aspect of learning, including the concept of the zones of proximal development, provides a theoretical basis for the selection of members of ALGs. Rogoff's work on apprenticeship, which draws heavily on Vygotsy and Piaget's work, provides an explanation of how learning in the ALG occurs. Lave & Wegner and Salomon's contributions to the theory of Distributed Cognition provides an understanding of the importance of interaction between the learner, the action, the context, the meaning-making and ways of knowing contribute to learning. The group was shown to work together in this project to produce meaning and meaning was also produced and distributed through the activity of negotiation and discussion in the ALGs

The Multiliteracies theorists provide an understanding of how meaning is made and patterns of meaning in the form of the design of different modes. Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences provides a possible explanation as to why some learners are more skilled in certain modes and provides clues about how to use these 'intelligences' to develop the learner.

It was on the basis of these theories that I investigated what happened if learners were placed in ALGs of differing types. I found that there was no clear cut answer as to which ALG arrangement was the most useful, as this depended on the type of learning required, the type of task to be completed, as well as the personalities, race, friendships and power relations between members of the ALGs. In other words, the success of the ALG as a pedagogical practice is heavily dependent on the socio-cultural context and site in which the learning is taking place. ALGs, as a set of pedagogical practices is embedded within the specific histories, languages and backgrounds of the individual learners who come together in the ALGs. Thus ALGs depend on context interaction and situatedness (Cole & Engestrom;1993)

For the ALG arrangement to be useful the teacher should know his or her learners well in terms of their histories, backgrounds, intelligences and cultures, and be innovative, vigilant and sensitive to the needs of all the learners. He or she can then explore with his or her own classes which ALG arrangement produces the desired outcome for the particular group of learners he or she is working with at the time.

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