

The rEvolution: A Beginning

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The following is a recounting of an innovation in Teacher Education that significantly challenges most current structures for learning to teach. This narrative recalls and comments upon the events from the first two weeks in January of 2012 for: 31 teacher education students enrolled in the Community of Inquiry in Teacher Education cohort (CITE) from the University of British Columbia, their instructors, 13 teachers from Hamilton Elementary School in Richmond BC, administrators from the school, the Richmond school board, parents, students and university co-coordinators.

Ten of our students have enthusiastically agreed to assist this recounting as Contributing Authors of this paper. Their words, and those of other contributors, appear (in italics) throughout to provide examples, add emphasis, provide clarity and context, and to share how these two weeks dramatically influenced their growth as new teachers. Their names are Brittney Britt, Becca Ferguson, Natalia Glauser, Lauren Green, Tina Huynh, Taryn Klatt, Rachel Neufeld, Brian Sampson, Angela Song, and Adam Stokes. We are deeply indebted to them for their contributions and commitment to the roots of the "rEvolution".

Vision

We (the authors of this paper) met in 2006 in the roles of Faculty Advisor and Student Teacher. The challenging process of succeeding in practicum gave rise to many philosophical discussions regarding how schooling should be and how teacher education required profound reform - a revolution in educational thought.

Since then we have collaborated on many projects. Our academic vision emerged from and continues to evolve as a result of a doctoral dissertation on complexity thinking in envisioning democratic classrooms (Collins, 2002) and a master's e-portfolio on democratic schooling with an enactive approach (Ting, 2011). The latter was entitled *The Revolution*.

Through a Complexity lens, we see that current schooling tends toward categorization, measurement and accountability, and a prescriptive curriculum. Although this provides organization, it ignores the sometimes chaotic interplay among the constantly evolving elements of the living, adapting, complex system of schooling. In attempting to impose a simplistically organized structure on a dynamic body comprised of children, teachers, administrators, parents and a myriad of community stakeholders, it appears to have a contrived falseness. This reduced, arbitrarily manufactured matrix ignores the interconnections, the diversity, and the creativity that gives this co-evolving system its life. It resists adaptive change and, therefore, ironically inhibits learning. Teacher Education perpetuates this reduction by creating a chasm between the academy and the practice of teaching.

Most of us came from a traditional education system where subjects were rigidly divided into their own blocks and taught separately from one another. But the real world is not segmented at all! It is so complex with natural, seamless integration, so why shouldn't this integration continue into the classroom? (Rachel)

Complexity Thinking, which is at the root of our teaching philosophy, views learning systemically rather than merely mechanically. Learning environments are in a constant state of change because each agent (principal, staff, kids, parents, and others) are interacting continually. Complex systems are always adapting, evolving, and learning.

These interactions and relationships link people and ideas together dynamically in such a way that classrooms never settle into a state of equilibrium. Learning is always unpredictable. Complexity lies at the heart of creativity, exploration, and discovery. This challenges any attempt to tightly structure learning environments for our students (Collins and Clarke, 2008, p. 1004).

The natural response to Complexity in terms of an approach to teaching is "Enactivism" (Collins and Clarke, 2008, p. 1009). Enactivism respects the real world with its complexity. Students become inseparable from knowledge while interacting in its natural context. This means that learning is active physically, intra-active intellectually through reflection, and interactive socially. For education students, the

practicum is a salient example. In this case, student teachers learn to teach by enacting teaching under the guidance of mentors.

We spend all day talking about the practice of teaching, but are so far removed from it every day in our 'neat and tidy' classrooms at UBC. How can we expect to fully comprehend the daily reality and complexity of a teaching career if the majority of our degree is spent in a contrived environment? (Rachel)

In keeping with Complexity Thinking, we do not see that there is a separation between theory and practice other than a contrived one. Rather, they are different perspectives of one concept, "praxis" if you like, that is in interplay. Theory does not beget practice or vice-versa. Rather, they influence each other simultaneously. Similarly, while Complexity informs our philosophy of teaching through Enactivism, enacting our teaching informs our appreciation of complexity.

I have spoken incessantly about complexity, have been in discussions with peers, with Steve and Hermia, and have read about complexity. However, it wasn't until I finally enacted teaching and experienced complexity at its finest, that I began to grasp it in all of its complexity. (Angela)

Statement of Purpose

We believe that all the university course work for teacher education could be enacted within the context of professional teaching in a school. This natural context is relevant and safe for learning to teach. Educational methods, theory, and philosophy could all be enacted simultaneously through teaching by beginning teachers. The process of learning to teach, in this case, is contextualized within the walls of a school building, with actual children, mentoring teachers, participating administrators, and immersed university instructors and advisors.

At the beginning of the year, student teachers came in expecting prescriptive, step-by-step instructions on "how to teach". A Teacher Education Program that promotes an enactivist approach shows student teachers that there is not one correct way of teaching, but many. (Tina)

Such an arrangement will certainly not be stress-free but the connectedness and added meaning that results will provide cohesion - a connected purpose, focus, and commitment to individual children and to the profession in general.

Student teachers are overloaded with coursework, causing them to directly feel the effects of reductionism—the disconnect between the university and their practicum school—but leaves them powerless to negotiate this discomfort. (Tina)

Being on school grounds changed the whole dynamic and atmosphere in a very positive way. Sitting in university classes all day can easily take the focus away from the genuine reason for why we go into teaching. Stressful moments in our portable at Hamilton were easily and immediately extinguished by faint giggles from students outside our window. (Taryn)

I really benefited from the enactive approach because we weren't just discussing hypotheses with our own peers and teachers. We were able to see the social justice issues happening right on the school grounds. (Angela)

For us, the opportunity to make our first tentative experimental step toward this grand vision arose in January 2012 at Hamilton Elementary School with an enthusiastic and supportive staff and a diverse group of children. Community of Inquiry in Teacher Education (CITE) is a respected Teacher Education Cohort that is known for experimentation and innovation in its approach to Teacher Education. As instructors in the CITE cohort, we undertook the teaching of Social Studies Methods and Educational Studies in an integrated, two-week, intensive immersion setting. The acronyms for the two courses, in the spirit of integration, morphed into "EdSSt".

Precedents

Other university instructors in our cohort have made advances within a similar philosophy. A Physical Education course took place for two weeks in an elementary school (Clarke and Hubball, 2001). The seemingly natural integration of Social Studies Methods and Educational Studies had taken place before. Social Studies Methods had been carried out at an elementary school during four full days, two weeks apart (Clouston, Hunter, and Collins, 2007). Looking forward, our Faculty of Education itself is in the process of reforming its teacher education program to increase its focus on in-school experiences and greater connections with schools. It also focusses on inquiry. Inquiry is at the heart of the story that follows.

School-based cohorts were ubiquitous about 30 years ago (Worthen, Owens & Anderson, 1975) before universities began to isolate them on campus for grounding in theory and philosophy which is essential in professional teaching. The enactive aspect of teacher education recognizing that new teachers have to learn to teach by actually teaching was not lost with this new arrangement. Significant excursions to the "field" in the form of practica were an essential part of the development of new teachers. These aspects continue to be considered the most significant source for learning to teach. Also, due to its disconnected nature, practicum is also the greatest source of anxiety and stress. Trying to apply the seemingly unrelated university course material can, in many cases, seem irrelevant to the daily experiences of beginning teachers. It is our assertion that if teacher education students started their program in a school and gradually increased their interactions with the teaching aspects of their activities, they would see directly how the theory and philosophy of teaching makes sense in practice. It is proposed here that the relevance and focus of unified practice and theory would reduce the stress and anxiety because the meaning of how and why teachers teach would be evident. Such an arrangement would still not be stress-free as teaching is inherently a challenging profession. However, the resulting cohesion and commitment to children and the profession would likely grow in a natural purposeful way.

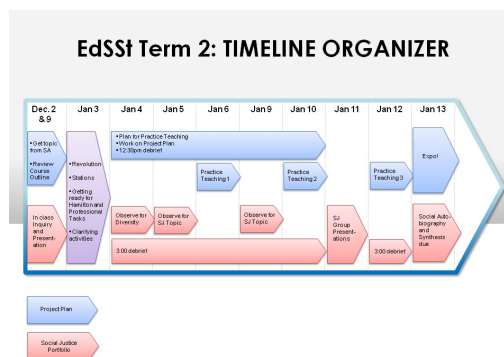
During the Hamilton Experience, we had the unique opportunity to learn theory and directly apply it the next day with a group of children. This helped drastically to both remove redundancy and decrease stress. The program was in no way stress free but it definitely felt incredibly relevant and meaningful. (Rachel)

Preparation

Clearly, this immersive, enactive approach to teacher education was one that we personally planned for and dreamed of for several years. As mentioned above, the CITE Teacher Education Cohort offered Social Studies Methods to its students for several years as four full days in a Richmond elementary school spread out over two months. This had become a highly successful project over the years. In June 2011, with the support of the administration at Hamilton, we made a proposal to the CITE Instructional Team to expand this project significantly as a more elaborate experiment. The team unanimously gave its approval.

It quickly became apparent that there were an incredible number of stakeholders involved in offering programs in teacher education and when changes were proposed, a complicated process of communication was required to reach a consensus. Each stakeholder had a unique responsibility, a different vantage point, and particular values that their position demanded that they pursue.

However, this seemed to be an idea whose time had arrived. We easily reaffirmed the support of Hamilton's administration, who began considering how to present the idea to teachers in the school, the parents, and the Richmond School Board. We soon had enthusiastic endorsements from the aforementioned parties. We sought further guidance from the CITE Coordinator, who clarified the processes to be followed, and provided strategies for their fulfillment.



One member of our instructional partnership for this course is a Richmond School District teacher. It was extremely important to us for her to be fully involved. She was the co-developer of the premise for the project, and had invested a significant amount of energy in planning, preparation and volunteering. The partnership also embodied the collaboration between the university and the school district and therefore embraced the philosophy behind it.

This however, required funding for release time. We were fortunate to have critical supportive colleagues at the university and the school district. We approached the Elementary Program Coordinator in the Teacher Education Office. He fully supported the idea and made suggestions as to how to write a funding proposal that met the criteria of a joint UBC - Richmond School District budget for supporting practicum-based initiatives. This proposal was tweaked by our CITE Coordinator and submitted to Richmond's Human Resources Administrator who quickly adopted it.

Hamilton's principal had worked his magic in informing his staff. We invited the teachers to a meeting to request their support in allowing our CITE Students into their classrooms to make observations and to practice the teaching of lessons from their project plans (high-interest theme based projects that are naturally integrated across several subject areas). We also requested that the teachers provide feedback and invited them to participate in our instructional sessions. Thirteen teachers offered to host us. Subsequently, the Parent Advisory Council provided their support as well. We had jumped through every hoop without a single objection. This was a validation of this approach to teacher education by essential and knowledgeable participants in education at every level. All that was left now was the actual preparation of the course and orientation for our students.

A significant philosophical and practical challenge for us was to reconcile the idea of integration (a salient aspect of our enactivist approach) with the political and bureaucratic expectations involved in offering a university course. In addition to our society's reductionist view of preparing new teachers by separating theory from practice, we also further divide that theory into disparate subject areas which take on political domains within the faculty's structure. As much as education instructors understand the value of an integrated curriculum, departments work hard to assert their individuality and autonomy. The result makes it very difficult to teach holistically in concert with the world for which we are preparing both our children and our new teachers.

In our effort to address the faculty requirements for both Ed Studies and Social Studies, we ended up with two "strands" that were interwoven mostly in terms of how activities appeared on the timetable, rather than a coherent framework for discovery of the social status of schools and a responsive approach to teaching practical social themes. We were not satisfied and trying to explain our attempts to please two masters (department requirements and our philosophical groundings in Complexity) to our students proved to be very challenging. To their credit, our students did struggle through with us and their eventual response was proactive, practical for their own students, and inspirational.

We provided a plan of activities that included:

- the creation of a project plan that addressed their students' needs and interests first and broad government standards second,
- observation of classrooms for evidence of issues of social justice and an exploration of their systemic roots,
- time for planning with instructors, teachers and kids,
- debriefs of experiences in the school and updates of planning and progress,
- practice teaching of lessons,
- feedback from teachers and other school personnel,
- creation of a fictional school based case study that examined a social issue,
- responses to each others' case studies,
- a social autobiography, and
- a display of their project plan with preparation to articulate their purposes, strategies and methods.

This program was demanding, engaging, relevant, personal, socially challenging, and ultimately rewarding. It was nothing like we predicted and it surpassed all of our expectations.

I felt a rush of excitement about the opportunity to approach and learn about teaching in an authentic and organic context where the traditional separation of theory, methods, and the actual practice of teaching would be stripped away. I was not prepared for the transformative experience that would soon unfold. (Becca)

Implementation

Although the vision for this kind of approach to teacher education had been born years before, the planning during the seven months prior to the two weeks at Hamilton was a complicated process of discussions, proposals, negotiations, plans, design of course materials, clarifications for students, re-negotiating, and re-planning.

Day One on Campus

Upon first presentation of the plan for EDSSt by our instructors, I could see that the CITE cohort was in for a whirlwind adventure that would be full of anxiety, learning and pushing the boundaries of thought and progress. (Lauren)

The first day of the actual course arrived and we stood in front of an eager, if a bit mystified, CITE Cohort, riveted in anticipation of the first words from their instructors. It was surreal as all the years of developing a vision and the months of intense planning and negotiation had come to this starting point in Scarfe Room 209 at the University of British Columbia one last time before we departed for Hamilton Elementary School in Richmond.

It was our transition day in which we updated our students' concepts of Complexity to clarify that it meant much more than just 'really complicated'. We wanted them to re-focus toward the systemic, the dynamic, and the interconnected. This would be essential for their inquiry into issues of social justice as observed in a contextualized setting.

We also viewed the TED Talk by Ken Robinson entitled "Bring on the Revolution" (2010). We presented this for inspiration, the implication being that these beginning teachers may be at the beginning of a movement for what Robinson asserts is a necessary and profound change in the way we implement education both in schools and in teacher education. We also wanted to highlight a distinction between Robinson's reductionist claim of how a revolution must be and our complexivist view. He asserts that "It's not evolution, it's revolution". He implies, likely for emphasis, that it must be one or the other. We claim real permanent change can only be both. To draw attention to this distinction, we took liberty in spelling this kind of change "rEvolution". It is collaborative, long term, and always in process.

The rest of the day was less inspirational: housekeeping information, once again going over expectations for tasks, fielding questions, reviewing prior students' unit plans, practice teaching placements at the school, and how to have more than 30 new adult inhabitants in an elementary school without being too disruptive.

Portable B

The next morning we arrived early at Hamilton Elementary School, one of the larger elementary schools in Richmond. It is attached to a newly expanded community center, which afforded us more space if needed (it was). We were given the keys to Portable B located about 30 meters outside of the school proper. This was to be our home for seven of the next eight days. It is an older structure, but newly renovated and just barely big enough to accommodate thirty-one university students and their two instructors. We brought our own microwave, toaster and kettle, created an environment where they could feel at home. This home base afforded us our own space for discussion, group planning, creating, and respite. An authentic teaching context was only a few paces away, as well as a source of lived expertise from administrators, teachers, and school children. Here, our teacher education students could practice their teaching with real children and observe concretely the effects of social justice issues in an extremely diverse population of students and educators.



Just steps away from the portable, I had access to the school and teachers for feedback. Also, the classroom teaching opened up opportunities to test out a few lessons. (Angela)

Observations

Since we had thirteen classroom teachers volunteer to share their students, it was fairly unobtrusive for two or three university students to visit each of the classrooms. The first task was to observe the classrooms for diversity. In any current classroom in a public school, finding diversity is not very difficult. Our students were guided by a questionnaire to broaden and deepen their recognition of various kinds of multiplicities, ie. ability, gender, race, learning preferences, and physicality. This led them to other observations on other days in which they narrowed the focus for their observations to the particular issues of social justice that they had already begun to investigate earlier on campus. While those previous inquiries were expectedly abstract and decontextualized, we were quickly surprised how the reverse condition, of being completely contextualized and immersed, also brought challenges to a complete vision of these issues. What they reported on in the later class discussion was the concrete, observable phenomena, which had overwhelmed their senses and their broader vision. They had lost their ability to attend to the abstract, the speculative, and the systemic roots of the issues under investigation.

It's so easy to talk about complexity when all you have to look at is four walls and a PowerPoint on a screen. But when you get into the real world, and actual living, breathing children are capturing your attention there is just too much to take in all at once! I think we all just forgot to stop and try to "think big", because it was all we could do to take in what was going on around us! (Rachel)

We had to make a new plan. This will be described further in a subsequent section of this article.

Practice Teaching

Similarly, the large number of participating teachers allowed us to divide each class into two or three groups so that student teachers could practice teaching lessons from their project plans in the children's own classroom. The aim was for our students to focus on content and the responses of the kids so that they could adjust their teaching accordingly. Classroom management was not the focus and the classroom teacher was present to redirect individual children if needed. Student teachers taught their lessons for a forty-five minute block and then taught the same lesson again for another forty-five minute block with a different group of children. It was quite gratifying to see how quickly student teachers could make adjustments to their teaching in a very short space of time in between the two blocks of teaching.

The opportunity to teach back-to-back lessons with two different groups of students was a brilliant way to be introduced to the diversity of the student body. The chance to immediately improve and adapt our lessons to a different group taught us the reality of teaching - that we can never be fully prepared. (Taryn)

Many of our students reported that this was an incredible learning experience for them and a very effective way to learn to teach in a typically unpredictable classroom. Others wished for more time in between. The context and the live feedback, as well as advice from classroom teachers immediately following their teaching, were invaluable. As on practicum, our students learned to teach by enacting teaching.

The realism [of practice teaching] was inherently stressful, and I found myself rewriting my project plan after each lesson to make it more meaningful for students. (Lauren)

Debriefs

We held two debriefs with the whole cohort each day. The first was at lunch and was meant for sharing teaching experiences, group problem solving, and receiving general feedback from instructors regarding practice teaching and planning. The second was at three o'clock and was intended for discussion regarding issues of social justice. This in itself highlights the timetabled separation between the two courses, Social Studies Methods and Educational Studies which we envisioned to be integrated.

To some degree, however, these two strands did merge somewhat since the real life context did not allow that contrived separation. Discussions during the set times frequently overlapped.

Teacher Involvement

As mentioned, Hamilton school, as a collective (administration, parents, teachers, and kids), fully endorsed the two-week immersion course at their school. The enthusiasm on the part of the thirteen teachers was key. Their belief in a school-based approach to teacher education led them to welcome our students into their classrooms, entrust their own students to beginning teachers for two hundred seventy minutes of instruction, provide feedback during their lunches and coach, encourage, and observe informally at every opportunity.

The first Thursday afternoon, after our students' second observations for social justice, we convened as usual at three o'clock in Portable B to debrief. A few teachers had made their way there early and were helping students with their project planning. As the instructors prepared to address the class, we had to stop abruptly. Looking out the window, we saw eight teachers making their way to Portable B to join our debrief. They spread themselves out and represented themselves in each of the seven groups of student teachers to contribute to the discussion. The already cramped space became difficult to navigate for instructors trying to make the rounds, but no one minded. There was a new energy in the room and new insights emerged from the discussions. This space had become an embodiment of university and public school collaboratively pursuing teacher education in an authentic, connected context. This was a turning point. We emailed our supervising professor: "Something special is happening here. You better come out and see!"

The Blog from Hell

Not everything went well, and if there is one thing we will modify it will be the blog exercise that we returned to the university campus to complete. The task was a good idea. As we will discuss presently, we had managed to move our students' focus from the concrete to the systemic as they continued their inquiry into social justice. The task was for each of the 7 groups to write a fictional case study on a student, teacher, parent, etc. who was affected by some instance of injustice at school. These were shared on blogs with the rest of the class and the others were expected to respond - which they did in unexpected volume.

In the morning of the second Wednesday, the students embraced the task with enthusiasm and by noon each of the groups had posted an original, contentious scenario of a problematic situation that could occur in school.

What we failed to recognize was the driven, somewhat perfectionist, nature of this group of students. We had grossly underestimated the extent and intensity of how our students wanted to respond to each others' blogs.

Where some of the difficulty came in for our group was around the comments and replies to comments required by the activity. There was a split in our group about whether we wanted to reply collectively or individually. This coming at the end of a fervent day, nestled in the middle of an intense two weeks, caused some tension to flare. (Adam)

They, in kind, misinterpreted our expectations and the event became stressful. Minor technical issues added to the stress.

Clearly this exercise must be redesigned to incorporate the enthusiasm of the morning but to clarify and modify expectations for the afternoon segment.

Expo

By the end of the second week, everyone was focused on the big event. Anyone with a possible interest had been invited to attend an exposition of our students' dedicated and creative hard work at project planning. We had invited all the district's sponsor teachers, administrators, school district administrators, school trustees, university faculty members, other teacher education cohorts, past program graduates, children, and their parents.

In keeping with our mysterious method of planning, we also thought this day would be a good time to express our appreciation to Hamilton school staff for hosting us. These two events, along with last

minute preparation and many course tasks due on this final day, made for a lot of work and an exhausting day for all.

The cohort provided a lunch for the staff, complete with speeches from a cohort representative and from the principal. Many impromptu expressions of thanks and celebration of a successful experiment followed. It was an emotional event and a wonderful validation of the efforts of all represented in that crowded staff lunchroom.

I feel that people should know that overall everyone really liked the course. (Rachel)

The Project Plan Expo was the culmination of this two-week course. The cohort and its instructors were scrambling to be ready for a 3 o'clock start. Just after lunch, the principal invited the instructors into his office and suggested we start at 2 to capitalize on the end-of-school movement through the foyer where the event was to be held. We hesitated, looked at one another, tentatively gulped, and offered a compromise. "2:30"?

At 2:30, the foyer between the school and the community center was (nearly) transformed into a gallery that expressed our students' aspirations to teach with excellence. The displays easily exceeded any of our expectations. They were colourful, engaging, and clear. Although we had done similar things with other groups on a lesser scale, this had become an event like no other. It was gratifying to see our students' hard work and learning displayed in this concrete manner. At 2:33 (Hamilton's dismissal time), the foyer went through yet another dramatic transformation. Parents collected their children from classrooms and all headed for the main exit through the school's foyer. This meant that the energy of the school, embodied by kids, parents, teachers, and school staff, coalesced at our Project Plan Expo, drawn by the attractive displays. A sense of carnival filled the space.

As the afternoon progressed, we were joined by teachers from outside the school, past CITE students, and top administrators from both the district and the university. Once again, our students made us proud. Not only had they worked very hard and produced amazing displays, but also they now demonstrated that they knew their stuff intimately, in a profoundly connected way, and could express their knowledge and plans in a highly articulate manner.

Many of our visitors approached us to congratulate us on a successful project. The top administrators in particular made a point to tell us what a wonderful job we had done. These comments both pleased and puzzled us. This was truly a collaborative venture undertaken by the university, the Richmond School District, and Hamilton School. We didn't teach any differently than we always had. However, together with all the stakeholders, we had created a rich and relevant learning environment. Our students grasped the opportunity to maximize their learning. These young new teachers were the ones to be congratulated.

... we were also able to explain to parents, teachers, faculty, and Richmond School Board Members the rationale behind our curricular choices. As a group, we felt that our work was both valued and appreciated by those we respect most in the teaching community. (Rachel)

Outcomes

The success of this project, in terms of learning and the scope of collaboration among stakeholders, seems undeniable based on the universal endorsement from all involved. Such acceptance of a project was not within the prior experience of either of the co-instructors.

District Feedback

Shortly after the completion of the two-week course, we received a letter of support from the Superintendent of Schools. It included the following:

I was also struck by the fact that the students had the benefit of a risk-free way to learn and experiment, as they had the ongoing support of their cohort and their teachers as they developed their projects and implemented them in the classroom.

Learning a complicated craft such as teaching is not easy, and much of it, like all good learning, is done through an experiential trial and error process. Being immersed in a supportive and collaborative environment such as that provided by the two-week portion of the CITE program

represents the best of learning and models the kind of innovation that characterizes the best of teaching in Richmond.

The School District is very appreciative of your efforts and would be supportive of any initiatives that maintain, expand or enhance the immersion aspects of the program. (Dr. Monica Pamer)

We also received a letter of support from the Principal of Hamilton Elementary School which included the following comments:

I have listed a few of the positive experiences below. The major benefits I observed:

For the school:

1. *Our students took part in lessons to enhance their learning and received more individual instruction and attention with teachers and pre-service teachers.*
2. *The staff had a chance to observe and be a part of conversations with pre-service teachers on methods of instruction and issues in Social Studies education. A number of staff took part in an after school presentation of lessons and discussion of Social Studies with CITE students.*
3. *Parents had an opportunity to see the current state of Social Studies education methods and theory through the Curriculum Fair at the end of the program.*

For the CITE Students and Program:

1. *CITE students had an opportunity to plan Social Studies lessons and implement them in a timely manner with real classes.*
2. *Opportunity to discuss lesson with feedback from teacher practitioners.*
3. *Opportunity to see the range of lessons implemented from K-7.*
4. *Opportunity to get feedback from the school administration regarding Social Studies issues and lessons within the whole school community.*

I firmly believe that pre-service teachers will be better prepared by having more time in classrooms, designing lessons and programs and implementing them.

I would be willing to work with you again to continue this type of program. (Al Sakai)

Here, two very experienced leading educators saw the significant benefits of the immersed approach. Note that in both letters, a continuation or expansion of this kind of innovation is invited.

Engagement

Our students described the two-week experience as extremely intense, but worth the effort in terms of their learning and the quality of their final products. Indeed, their project plans were significantly superior than in past years of Social Studies Methods in terms of both content and creativity. The quality was commented on repeatedly by teachers, administrators, parents and students, during the final Project Plan Expo. Their depth of understanding for their learning was demonstrated through their articulate explanations to the visitors.

... this doesn't lend itself to easily complete a large project plan by the Friday at noon deadline! Many of us stayed up all night to complete it! But I can tell you this much, we were certainly invested in these project plans - perhaps more so than any other planning we had done previously in the program. They felt so relevant and important that we couldn't help but continue to fine tune them well into the night and right up until moments before the Expo began. (Rachel)

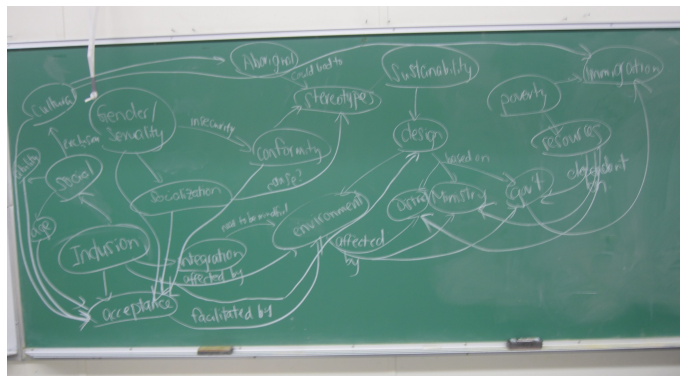
Students themselves confirmed our speculation and the opinions of other observers that this success was due to the students' opportunities for grounded planning. In other words, all of their ideas, theoretical understandings, and curricular guidance was intrinsically connected to specific children in the

school and the feedback they received from the teachers of these children. Whenever our students had an idea or a question, they could check it with the real experts: the kids.

For the first lesson, I presented the children with a mosaic with images and written clues about what we would be learning and they had to work in groups to solve the mystery. During that time, I was so preoccupied with timing that it overtook my thoughts. Later on, as I taught the lesson again, I was able to mentally step back and adapt my teaching to their interests and to the situation. (Becca)

Integration

As instructors, we struggled to integrate the two courses. The methods course was easily connected to specific practice, while investigating issues of social justice were less tangible. Furthermore, each course was separate in the eyes of university departments, each with their own expectations for delivery and assessment. We contrived two separate, but hopefully connected, strands as "professional tasks". We tried to avoid using the traditional term "assignment" (with all its extrinsically motivating connotations), in favor of students enacting an authentic professional approach to practice. We were doubtful that integration could be anything other than contrived in this case.



This will be an area that we will continue to examine and develop, but what actually took place was surprising. We sent our students into Hamilton School to examine issues of social justice within the context of the classroom. They were very good at reporting what was immediately observable. What was present in their direct observation, however, overwhelmed the bigger picture, the systemic roots that perpetuated these issues. They merely observed and reported without deep reflection.

The enthusiasm fueling those purposeful strides in Hamilton to observe signs of poverty [an issue of social justice] in the classroom quickly gave way to minor frustration. My naive conception of what poverty must look like was not there and it made me question what minute details or covert signs I was missing. (Tina)

We tweaked the observation task. Rather than giving them a linear form to guide their observations, we had them use a web so that the idea of interconnections might lead them to more systemic thinking. This time when they reported back, the connections were much clearer, and as each group debriefed to the class, we created our own web on the board based on their comments. We connected themes among all the groups and it became apparent that all the issues of social justice were overlapping, connected, and complex.

My observations are all based on what I am seeing. Then I wondered - what if I do find someone who is living in poverty? Do I label the child and move on? I realized that as a teacher we need to be aware that, although students may interconnect between different labels, we cannot see our students as labels. We have to look beyond the labels and see them as individuals with their unique set of strengths and challenges. (Brittney)

As mentioned earlier, we had each group write a fictional case study regarding a student, or anyone else associated with school, who was affected by the particular social justice issue being investigated in each group. These were posted to a blog and other class members responded to them. This task was not as successful as we had hoped due to unforeseen time demands and technical issues. However, it was a further opportunity for each student to become more aware of all of the social justice issues and their interconnections.

It was difficult to locate and observe the direct teaching of Aboriginal cultural and historical content to students, regardless of ancestry. Our group became cognizant of the fact that we needed to be critically searching for systemic reasons behind why there might be a lack of Aboriginal Education in Richmond schools, rather than strictly seeking out surface-level observations. This crucial epiphany would not have been reached as readily had we not been immersed in a school setting, and having the benevolent assistance of Hamilton staff and students. (Lauren)

The surprise we referred to earlier came when we read the project plans and got student feedback. Although we were skeptical about integration, we discovered that since our students had been immersed in the various issues of social justice, when it came to planning their projects, they could not help but be aware of these issues both specifically and in general.

It is not enough to raise awareness and "fact find" when as teachers, we can challenge ourselves and are in a position to make concrete changes in a professional, authentic, and respectable manner. (Tina)

We discovered after the fact that in this case the two courses were very much integrated in a natural manner. In fact, it appeared to some students that this was meticulously planned.

It was after I taught the first lesson of my project plan on Canadian Pioneers that I began to see that EdSSt was not merely two isolated strands, but it was a carefully knitted amalgamation of methodology, theory, and practice. (Lauren)

To me, this illuminated just how crucial issues of power, race, culture, class, and many other social justice issues are and that they are naturally a part of the classroom and the learning material. They do not need to be discussed in a stand-alone fashion and can instead be enacted contextually. This represents a shift in teaching that moves away from being focused on integrating social justice into a unit plan in a predetermined way. Instead, it allows it to emerge naturally. (Becca)

Recommendations

We would like to build on this success. We fully expect to expand on this project in the future, stepping gradually (or running quickly) toward a full implementation of the rEvolution in teacher education in which all university coursework takes place within the context of an elementary school. As such, there are a few things that we have learned from this experience that we can use to improve our subsequent efforts.

Integration

... seeing the interconnections between socioeconomic status, race, class, gender, and many other facets of what makes people who they are. We are all intersections of these things and the interplay among them is what comprises an individual, a classroom, and a teacher. (Becca)

It is comforting to realize that when students become attuned to social issues, these issues will become part of their planning. However, we as instructors must merge the two strands. In the spirit of a project based approach, we have to remove the focus on subjects (in this case the two courses) and focus on helping our students learn to teach in general across subject areas. We believe that we will still be accountable to university departments. It is very likely that in teaching while being guided by a "big picture", students will inevitably teach social issues - both in terms of teaching methods and social justice. Of course, this will also be an objective of our facilitation.

So much of what teachers do is try to build a solid relationship with students in order to guide them in the right direction and give them the tools for success in the classroom. Through observation of social justice issues and immediate debrief with my cohort and instructors, I've

learned that social justice issues such as ethnic diversity, gender, and inclusion play a huge role in planning units and lessons. (Angela)

By melding the focus of the course, we will eliminate distracting factors and complicated instructions. In our efforts to add coherence, an undivided vision will enable descriptions of clear, project-focused learning goals.

Stress Reduction

Reflecting back on this event, I understand the arduous aspects were necessary to fully process enactive learning and teaching, as well as facilitating sincere pride in the end result. (Natalia)

As mentioned, students described this experience as intense. Indeed, the instructors also found the pace exhausting. In spite of the benefits in terms of engaging challenges and stimulating interactions, much could be done to reduce stress.

- The schedule is in dire need of balance in terms of tasks and activities. The bulk of the demand came near the end of the two weeks. On the final Friday, for instance, we hosted a staff appreciation lunch for the teachers, the Expo, and it was the final day for all of the tasks to be completed. In the future, this intensity at the end must be redistributed back to the first week. A more naturally integrated, coherent plan and schedule should provide focus, reduce confusion, and lessen stress. Hard work, when relevant, with immediate response, can be rewarding and lift spirits.
- Deadlines will be extended beyond the final day in the school.
- The blog activity will be reworked so that the responses can be made over days rather than all in one afternoon. This will also tie it in more with the ongoing daily experiences with social issues at the school.
- Stress breaks and early dismissals will be added.

Questions

As we approach the next phase of the Hamilton Experience (as our students referred it), several points of inquiry arose that will guide further academic investigation into our practice as university instructors extending an innovative approach to teacher education.

- Maintaining both relevance and systemic thinking:
Does the contextualized experience promote concrete, limited, practical reflection at the expense of higher thinking about root causes, history, complexity, and entrenched social systems? If so, how shall we mitigate this?

It is important to ask what could be lost in the abandonment of isolating compartmentalized learning... will it be less likely to inspire regular reflection? (Brian)

- Maintaining both the practical and the reflective:
Will teachers over-promote the concrete as part of their daily experience or will our students' extended thinking encourage teachers to think more broadly about their practice? How will we as instructors promote "big picture thinking"? How will we as instructors understand and respect the day-to-day wisdom of teachers' actions and insights "in the moment".
- Role adjustments:
What happens when progressive educational ideas are enacted in a "traditional" institutional setting? It seems there will be an adjustment in power relationships. Will university instructors maintain their "academic authority"? Will we be free to push boundaries with progressive educational thought? Will this effort be disruptive in the classroom? Clearly some negotiation will be required along with a proactive partnership. In keeping with the contextualized nature of the course, we speculate about whether this partnership can also be seamless without compartmentalizing either the academic or the practical roles that have typically been embodied in certain job descriptions.
- Enhanced professional relationships:

This intimate, intense environment seems to promote a closer bond between instructors and students. What are the pros and cons? How can we utilize these closer relationships to enhance the learning experience? How can we maintain a professional distance as well?

- A focus on both practicum context and a career in teaching:
Students remarked that they appreciated the experience of teaching children who were not their own practicum students. It has consistently been a challenge for teacher education students to resist becoming overwhelmed by their own practicum site. On one hand, the context provided is exactly what is needed in enacting teaching in an authentic, contextualized setting. On the other hand, however, the realization that this is a temporary teaching and learning experience which will eventually give way to a greater context - a career in teaching - is obscured. It will be interesting to discover if this "practicum-based" course can promote a larger focus in providing an alternate setting for student reflection on their practice.

Conclusion

For me, the "Hamilton Experience" was an active exchange of theory, social context, and curricular framework that is so much a part of the broader schema of critical pedagogy. By being immersed in the school setting, I was able to seek out information from students, teachers, and administrators in ways I could not foresee taking place in the confines of our U.B.C classroom. The connections made with staff and students at Hamilton were extremely important for my own development as a professional teacher and the links between theory, curriculum and direct practice became more apparent. (Natalia)

This paper has been primarily a recounting of events that took place in the fall of 2011, culminating in an innovative approach to university coursework in January of 2012. Many people were involved in the success of this venture and all of these people are now believers in this way of undertaking university coursework in order to learn to teach through enacting teaching in a complex school environment. We have also outlined the problems encountered and all that we learned from this experience.

The notion of having more such chances (the Hamilton Experience) for future student teachers is imperative to truly live the complexities of educative practice. (Natalia)

We have been gratified by what we consider to be a very successful start to the rEvolution. This is very much the first baby step rather than a summary of a project. Our extended vision is to host a small teacher education cohort in a welcoming school like Hamilton to undertake the entirety of their coursework content in a practicum-based experience for their whole year of teacher training.

Clearly there is a lot further to go and much work to be done. Each step forward educates us as to the nature of this enterprise. It is an exciting and important project in which to be involved. We welcome all participants who share this vision of the enactment of teacher education within the domain of kids and their teachers.

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