Embracing cultural wealth: innovative approaches to curriculum delivery in primary teacher education

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Keywords: curriculum, linguistic capital, innovation, Changing Teacher Educational Contexts

Introduction

This article evolved out of a presentation at London Metropolitan University for the annual Learning and Teaching Conference in 2020 entitled *Embracing cultural wealth: innovative approaches to curriculum delivery in primary education*. This paper adopts Yosso's (2005) outline of community cultural wealth as it explores an innovative approach to curriculum delivery. The aims are therefore twofold. Firstly, to discuss critical race theory (CRT) and the cultural capital that students bring to the institution of higher learning and secondly, the empowerment gained by students through innovative practice with respect to acknowledging their linguistic capital.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT evolved in the United States of America (USA) as a result of systemic racism faced by blacks in that country. It grew from the American legal system and uses storytelling or narrative to convey societal issues such as race, class, culture and education (Yosso, 2005; Delagado and Stefanic, 2017). Yosso (2005:70) suggests that, 'Critical Race Theory is a framework that can be used to theorise, examine and challenge ways that racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses.' Gillborn (2006) contradicts this as he suggests that CRT is a perspective not a theory as it 'does not have a finished set of propositions that claim to explain current situations' (Gillborn, 2006:19). However, in their work, Delgado and Stefanic (2017:7) state that 'many in the field of education [today] consider themselves to be critical race theorists who use CRT's ideas to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy.' I concur with these suggestions and am aware of the challenges involved in engaging with CRT in education.

In England, CRT is deemed to be in its 'infancy' compared to the USA. Chakrabarty, Roberts and Preston (2014) the conveners of the UK CRTdiscussion group, acknowledge the 'struggles' of CRT within English education and academia (page 1). There are similarities and differences in the USA and England with regards to CRT. The similarities are due to structural racism in both societies and important differences of the history and 'European theoretical inflections' (Ibid). However, due to the constraints of this article these similarities and differences will not be addressed.

Community Cultural Wealth

In conceptualising community cultural wealth as a critical race theory (CRT) challenge to traditional interpretations of cultural capital, Yosso (2005) critiques the lack of acknowledgement by institutions of higher learning of the community cultural wealth brought to institutions by students, particularly students of colour. She also critiques the work of Bourdieu's cultural capital (1986), which she sees as one of the traditional interpretations based on the narrow values of the white middle class which is 'more limiting than wealth' (Yosso, 2005:77).

Yosso argues that Bourdieu's work was often used to explain 'social and racial inequity' and the reason that 'students of colour do not succeed at the same rates as whites' (Ibid). Hence her presenting an alternate view of the capitals that communities of colour have. Although Yosso's (2005) research is based in the USA, there is concern in the United Kingdom about the success of students who are Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME). UUK and NUS (2019) concluded that there was a disparity of 13% between white and BAME students getting a first or 2:1. Being aware of this disparity, I am using Yosso's (2005) work to explore and inform my practice in valuing the forms of capital that students bring to London Metropolitan University.

Yosso (2005) identifies six forms of capital used by students which produces 'community cultural wealth' which goes against the deficit suggestions regarding non-white students that is often problematised within institutions of higher learning.

The six forms of capital identified by Yosso (2005) are: *aspirational capital whereby students hold on to their aspirations of the future in spite of challenges they may face; linguistic capital where the students are exposed to rich traditions of storytelling and memorisation as bilingual or multilingual speakers with rich communication skills via 'visual art, music and poetry' (pg. 79)* which may also include translating for family members. Familial capital which links the extended family to kinship and a strong sense of community who will pool their resources to face common issues such as being racialised; social capital maintaining social networks in the community to support learning in higher education and giving back to others as they prepare to attend similar institutions, navigational capital which refers to the 'psychological and social' tactics which communities of colour exercise to be successful in achieving the qualifications they need in spite of the environments which may be 'racially-hostile' (pg. 80) or stressful and resistant capital which uses the knowledge ascertained from structural racism to transform the structures which oppress the communities of colour.

In adopting Yosso's work to explore the innovative practice of encouraging students to share the languages they speak and use with their families, friends and communities, I will be incorporating the resilience shown by students in their aspirational capital and how their linguistic capital was displayed in the mini lessons that they prepared, modelled and demonstrated in a language teaching session.

Context: Curriculum, learning and subject knowledge

The BA Honours Primary Education (two-year accelerated degree) commenced at London Metropolitan University in 2018. Apart from placing students at the heart of the course to complete accelerated study in two years, the objectives of the course were to emphasise the centrality of professionalism and the professional teacher to realise the aims of the primary curriculum, whether in meeting specific learning targets, addressing the specific learning needs and identities of

learners, or ensuring an appropriately facilitative school ethos. The course assessment included a range of modes such as research proposal podcasts, posters, presentations, reflective diaries, alongside formal written genres. During the second year, the module Curriculum, Learners and Learning all focused on teachers' subject knowledge as the subjects of the National Curriculum (NC) (DfE, 2013) and Religious Education were explored. Students were introduced to subject knowledge audits which provided an opportunity for them to set targets, to reflect on their strengths and begin to identify areas that they may need to develop while contemplating applying for postgraduate teacher training.

Students engaged in learning about the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011) particularly, Part 1 which focused on teaching and learning. There was a sharp focus on teaching standard 3 which states:

> 'A teacher must demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge: have a secure knowledge of the relevant subject(s) and curriculum areas, foster and maintain pupils' interest in the subject … demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English' (p. 11).

One of the subjects taught on the module is Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in Keystage 2 of the NC (DfE, 2013). In discussing the Purpose of Study (PoS) for teaching MFL, students were encouraged to prepare mini lessons in languages they knew. Their lessons were planned for an interactive session reflecting Teaching Standard 3 (DfE, 2011) and the aims of MFL included in the PoS:

> 'Children should be taught to understand and respond to spoken and written language from a variety of authentic sources; speak with increasing confidence, fluency and spontaneity, finding ways of communicating what they want to say, including through discussion and asking questions, and continually improving the accuracy of their pronunciation and intonation (DfE, 2013: 1).

I knew from my practice of relational pedagogy (Papatheodoru and Moyles, 2008) and getting to know the students that there were bilingual and multilingual speakers (speaking one or more languages) who experienced language (as identity) barriers in class discussions and in written summative assessments.

The complexity of 'language', language study, and the terms and context in which these are discussed have grown through the years (Little, 2019). The complexity arises from terms such as 'family' and 'home language' or 'heritage language' where using the metaphor of 'Aunt Edna's vase is passed on from one generation to the next' (Little, 2019:7). Discussions of 'English as a first language' to 'English as an additional language' have their tensions and debates. However, Little (2019:7) suggests that 'terminology may be divisive and yet unifying'. As a teacher educator with an interest in literacy, I was keen for the cohort of students to understand, explore and engage with 'authentic sources' (DfE, 2013:1) in ways which included spontaneity and developed confidence in the interchangeable roles of teachers and learners.

Mini lessons in world languages

Eight languages were covered in the mini lessons which included spoken word, songs and dialogue. The languages used by the students in the lessons were: German, Hebrew, Italian, Portuguese, Swedish, Somali, Turkish and Twi. The students who led the sessions as teachers had a mixture of identities: African, Asian, Mixed heritage, Turkish and White. In engaging with their peers, the students were aware that they were in a safe space where they had an opportunity to share some of their culture through language. Here I concur with Yosso's (2005) use of 'culture [which] refers to behaviours and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people' (p.75). The students acknowledged that they were nervous at the start but felt so supported by their peers that the nervousness was replaced with confidence and enjoyment.

Almost all the lessons included greetings such as hello, goodbye, good morning and thank you. The mini lessons in Hebrew and Somali focused on colours. In giving the background to the languages that they shared, students included their lived experiences of working abroad in Italy and Sweden for example, where one student worked as a nanny and another taught English as a foreign language. The mini lessons from these students were in Swedish and Italian.

Two taught children's songs, one in Portuguese and the other in Turkish. Both were keen for their peers to understand the meanings and demonstrated the actions which went with the songs. Brief conversations of migration and adapting to an English culture were discussed by these students. The Turkish speaker was born in England but often acted as the translator for the family and community.

Two students demonstrated a dialogue in German. One was a German citizen who had travelled to the UK to complete the course and another had learnt German in school. They explained the differences in the accents and intonations of being a native speaker of the language and the nuances which occur when learning the language as a MFL in the English classroom. The complexities of languages inferred by Little (2019) was evident in their discussion to the class.

The student whose lesson was one of the languages spoken in Ghana reflected that she had never had an opportunity to share Twi in any of her educational settings. Her comment was as follows:

> *I loved being able to teach Twi in class in our mini teaching lesson. Despite feeling a little nervous before doing it, I really enjoyed being able to share my language with others, especially as everybody appeared to really want to learn. Listening to others present their languages was also so fun and enjoyable as people presented in various different ways. It was also lovely to learn a little more about my peers and the languages they know and love.*

Other feedback comments are included below*:*

It was good to be able to practice a mini lesson in front of others. It was good to be able to practice preparing for the mini session and watch others deliver.

The pace and focus on a subject each week has been really helpful and I have found myself engaging and contributing even in areas I was nervous about - languages specifically.

Nice to follow on from a previous module from last year. Plenty of opportunity to deepen knowledge

Conclusion: Reflecting on learning and identifying next steps

Embedding this session in practice is of importance and can be aligned to the university's Education for Social Justice Framework (ESJF) (2019) which includes identity, personalisation and reflection. Empowering the students to share their understanding and knowledge of culture, language and identity through having the autonomy to devise and deliver a session on their 'own' language for their peers, enabled students to be confident and spontaneous (DfE, 2013).

Since introducing this approach in the Curriculum, Learners and Learning ll module in 2019, Covid-19 and online teaching impacted on the session delivery in 2020. However, for this current year students have identified the following languages that they speak and or write: Arabic, Hindi, Punjabi, Somali, Yoruba, Japanese, French, Creole, Greek, Pushto and German. They are excited to teach and share some of what they know with their peers. There is no place for a 'deficit' model of what students from different cultures can bring while working together in a diverse multilingual, multi-ethnic classroom.

 As an academic, one must be willing to continue to learn and adapt one's practice to ensure that students can achieve. Yosso's (2005) critique is valuable as she seeks to demonstrate that non white communities have cultural wealth which should be acknowledged and valued in institutions of higher learning.

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