

Successful pedagogies for an Australian multicultural classroom

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A study undertaken in two primary schools and a pre-school in a multicultural urban area of NSW identified five pedagogical topics that incorporated successful teaching practices and processes that accord with the Delors Report recommendations. The report recommended that education for the future should be organised around the four pillars of learning, namely, learning to be, learning to do, learning to know and learning to live together. The five identified topics were: lesson organisation, lesson outcomes, teacher communication, teaching strategies, and cultural inclusion.

In order to address the needs of students, the five topics have been grouped into two student-focused themes: (a) the learning environment and (b) teacher-student communication. These themes are discussed from a theoretical perspective and illustrated with examples derived from research.

Cultural inclusion, pedagogies, *Delors Report*, learning environment, teacher-student communication, lesson organisation, multicultural classroom

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

A study undertaken in 2002 in two New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) primary schools, School A and School B, and a pre-school approved by the New South Wales Department of Community Services (NSW DOCS), School C, aimed to identify the pedagogical processes that target the recognition, importance and sharing of cultural diversity in teaching and learning as strategies for learning to live together in an Australian multicultural classroom. These pedagogical processes refer to teaching processes and practices that respond to the Four Pillars of Learning described as learning to be, learning to do, learning to know and learning to live together, in the UNESCO Delors Report *Learning: the Treasure Within* (Delors, 1996).

The schools were in an urban area of NSW which was characterised by high immigration from a diversity of countries and cultures, particularly since the end of World War II. A teacher from each of the primary schools was chosen for observation because each had been designated as a teacher of excellence by her peers and senior educational officials, and one had received an award from the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) for teaching excellence. The teachers have been identified as Teacher A, who taught English as a Second Language (ESL) Kindergarten class in School A; and Teacher B, who taught a combined Years 1 and 2 mainstream class, in which six of the 26 students were from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), two mornings each week. Teacher B's duties also included taking one of her Year 2 students and two students from other Year 1 and Year 2 classrooms for one-on-one withdrawal lessons, or in-class assistance in ESL.

The study undertaken in School C, the pre-school, was limited to the classroom environment which was recognised by the local community and the NSW DOCS as meeting the needs of the

local multicultural community. It did not include observations of the teaching processes and practices of the pre-school teacher. However, the pre-school was observed to have a broad range of cultural resources, many of which were borrowed from the local Children's Resource Centre that was funded by the Commonwealth Government Supplementary Services (SUPS) program that targeted children with special needs.

The research procedure used to identify the successful teaching processes and practices involved a synchronic analysis of the lessons of Teacher A and Teacher B, and a categorical analysis of the teaching practices of Teacher A and Teacher B. A categorical analysis of the resources of the classroom environment of the pre-school was made in order to identify the ways in which the classroom environment might enhance teaching processes and practices in multicultural classrooms.

FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

The findings from the analyses into the successful teaching processes and practices of Teacher A and Teacher B and the learning environment of School C were combined to form five pedagogical topics. These five topics drew together specific teaching methods that addressed the lesson and syllabus outcomes of the relevant educational levels, and demonstrated their appropriateness for inclusion in classrooms where the amount of cultural diversity was a variable factor. The five identified pedagogical topics that incorporated successful teaching process and practices were described as follows:

- (a) lesson organisation which included time and place;
- (b) lesson outcomes which were informed by syllabus guidelines and included teaching processes such as scaffolding and transfer;
- (c) teacher communication which included verbal communication and non-verbal communication such as gestures, proxemics and paralanguage;
- (d) teaching strategies which included questioning, feedback, holistic learning and teaching to multiple intelligences; and
- (e) cultural inclusion which acknowledged culturally specific activities and beliefs, promoted values, and established an ethos of respect for cultural diversity.

Since the research into the successful teaching processes and practices was focused on the teachers' performances, it was appropriate that the discussion of the implementation of these teaching processes and practices should be learner-focused. The reason for this was that even the youngest learners were culturally nurtured individuals with their own pre-learned knowledge, and since teachers were also the products of their cultural backgrounds, it was not possible for teachers to conclude, with certainty, that learners would always reflect, understand or attain the meanings that they were attempting to share or provide.

A learner focused discussion of the application of the components of the five successful pedagogical topics required a reorganisation of the components from those that reported on the teachers' performance to those that reflected the needs of learners. Therefore, two major student-focused themes were devised that incorporated the components of the five pedagogical topics. These two themes were:

- (a) learning environment.
- (b) teacher-student communication.

The theme 'learning environment' is comprised of: (a) scaffolding and transfer as instruction techniques; (b) the theory and application of holistic learning; and (c) teaching strategies that

specifically target the individual abilities and talents of children, and that are consistent with Gardner's (1999) theory of multiple intelligences. Teacher-student communication is also sub-divided into verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication consists of the effect of prior language learning of children at the entry level into formal education, language as a symbolic system, inference, questioning and feedback. Non-verbal language includes features such as gesture, proxemics, voice intonation and gaze. An overview of the applications and implications of teaching strategies, organised under the themes of learning environment and teacher-student communication, consists of discussions of relevant theoretical literature that are illustrated with examples from the research conducted in the primary schools and the pre-school.

The Learning Environment

The research undertaken in School A and School B exemplifies a range of attitudes to early education that varies from the attitudes of parents who encourage children to explore learning opportunities such as libraries, clubs and other extra curricular and after school activities, to those of parents who have minimal interaction with their children because of work or domestic commitments. This includes parents who insist that children at the entry level into early formal education are too young to be concerned with serious learning. Similarly, parental participation in school life varies. Some parents are frequent visitors to the classroom and participate in activities such as developmental play and excursions. Other parents are interested in their children's progress, but do not actively participate in school activities, except to attend parent-teacher meetings that are associated with their children's progress. A minority of parents believe that early formal education can accommodate the child's interests rather than forcing the child to acquire new concepts or skills, especially if the child has learning problems in the development of new concepts or skills.

The challenge for the teacher is how to accommodate pre-existing or culturally modified learning methods and the parental expectations and attitudes that attend the young learner in early schooling. This research study identifies several pedagogical processes that address diverse learning experiences, but it also reveals that teachers need to work in supportive school programs and organisational structures if these approaches are to be successful.

The pedagogical processes that are identified are those that are conducive to the learning environment and address the extant cultural backgrounds of the students. The NSW Department of Education has recommended the following educational outcomes:

- (a) scaffolding and transfer of knowledge.
- (b) holistic learning.
- (c) teaching to multiple intelligences.

Scaffolding and the transfer of knowledge are methods of instruction; holistic learning is the organisation and integration of the knowledge and skills to be acquired; and teaching strategies that address multiple intelligences are programs and processes that specifically target abilities, talents and pre-existing skills of children that enable them to acquire knowledge and skills.

Scaffolding and Transfer of Knowledge

Scaffolding is the structured building of competencies on knowledge already possessed by the learner. It involves the connection between familiar and new information. Bransford, Brown and Cocking (1999) claim that tasks associated with scaffolding should motivate the learner, simplify the task, particularly the number of steps involved, focus on the goal or outcome, take note of significant discrepancies between the desired goal and the learner's achievements, control

frustration and provide a model of the skill to be performed. Transfer of knowledge is similar to scaffolding, but is associated with using acquired knowledge in new situations and transferring knowledge from one context to another. Successful transfer requires mastery of the original subject. Consequently knowledge learned by rote or memorised is not as effectively transferred as that which is understood.

Scaffolding and the transfer of knowledge are teaching strategies that require planning that is focused on the specific lesson outcomes and the long term educational program. Scaffolding may be problematic in classrooms where some children are frequently absent from school and therefore may miss stages in the learning process. The teacher can redress this difficult situation by including exercises that involve transfer as well as scaffolding.

Teacher B, who taught a combined Year 1-2 class, also provided support to ESL students, and relied on transfer rather than scaffolding to develop skills. She was employed part time and this precluded the use of an incremental scaffolding method of teaching. Since she taught literacy, numeracy, arts and crafts in the integrated Year 1-2 class, she collaborated with the class teacher to develop thematic approaches to the subject matter. This strategy made it possible for knowledge to be transferred from one learning discipline to another and from one teacher to the other. For example, in Term 3 of 2002, science, literacy and the arts and crafts lessons were organised around the theme of frogs. The thematic approach facilitated the transfer of skills and knowledge across the curriculum. In the individual support lessons for ESL students, she addressed specific skills being taught in the child's home class within the content of a different subject. This generated a transfer of learning from one context to another. Bransford et al. (1999) (1999) maintained that knowledge transfer was more effective when the subject was taught in more than one context.

Bransford et al. (1999) recognised the influence of culture on learning. They suggested that school failure might be the result of a mismatch between what was learned at home and what was learned at school because different meanings attached to cultural knowledge could affect transfer.

Holistic Learning

Holistic learning refers to the organisation of knowledge and skills to be addressed in school education. Holistic learning is an approach to learning that is all inclusive in terms of subject areas and the allocation of time to the acquisition of skills and knowledge. This type of learning presupposes an integrated curriculum and flexibility in lesson structure and the time allocated for learning. It breaks down artificial barriers between subject areas and seeks to explore subjects in breadth and depth. Holistic learning presupposes that lesson structures reflect the fluid nature of learning and are not interrupted by arbitrary time constraints. Holistic learning encompasses not only subjects that are measurable, but also a more spiritual or ethical depth to learning, that is, a recognition of the values that underpin human relations in society. These values extend beyond person to person interactions to encompass the care of the environment in all its manifestations such as animal life, nature and heritage.

Holistic learning may contradict Western notions of compartmentalisation of life and work. It confronts a world view where time is a linear concept focused on progress and therefore a future that is not within an individual's grasp or understanding. It advocates an interconnectedness of experience in which values are intrinsic to human activity and in which reflection on past experience is a positive means of informing the present and predicting the future. It permits children to explore the breadth of their subjects and to make connections between contemporary and past learning.

According to Duffy (1994), holistic learning includes a world view and a focus on the humaneness of the individual. Duffy believes that a world view should reflect the connectedness,

wholeness and meaning of experience; the humaneness of the individual should avoid dichotomies between mind and body, intellect and emotion, and rationality and intuition. He claims that an integrated curriculum should draw together these issues, and include a spiritual dimension to learning. The form of spirituality that Duffy envisages is not one that is based on religious belief but one that reflects on the individual in all of his or her being, that is, with cosmology, the nature of being, and a connection to the environment including ethics that contribute to humaneness. This point is supported by Teasdale (1999, p.82) who suggested that:

The whole area of cultural studies, civics, moral education, learning to live together, peace education, and spirituality cannot be taught by putting it into a box and trying to slot it into an already overcrowded curriculum. It is necessary to find ways of infusing these elements across all aspects of the curriculum.

Hall (1976) examined the Western world linear view of time, one that could be controlled and manipulated and that was focused on an immediate future. Hall contrasted this Western organisation of time with the Arab view that was polychronic. The polychronic view of time was illustrated by the fact that Arabs were highly sociable, rarely alone, and tended to carry on conversations with more than one individual simultaneously. Hall made the point that in cultures where time and action were not compartmentalised, the participants had a broader understanding of context than Westerners whose context for action was limited to one stage of a process at a time, that is, a linear view of time.

Adams (1968) described the American concept of time, (and this could be extrapolated to include all Western societies) as future focused. He made the point that time was viewed as cyclical in Korea, with the future a kind of repetition of the past. Adams believed that the different attitudes of the Americans and the Koreans to time were reflected in their attitudes and cultures. Westerners were preoccupied with dominating culture, whereas, Koreans lived in harmony with culture and therefore would prefer to conform rather than to create. This concept of time as being non-linear, reflecting the past, the present and the future, was discussed by Teasdale and Teasdale (1999) who described the way in which Aboriginal knowledge was reinforced by a focus that transcended time. Aboriginal people conceived time as past continuous. It was cyclical rather than linear whereby the past was part of the present and the future.

Holistic education has the capacity to develop the quality that Duffy (1994) describes as humaneness. This may be achieved through values education. In their overview of the current debate on values in the curriculum of Australian schools, Aspin, Chapman and Klenowski (2001) discuss the relevance of values education and its embodiment in subjects throughout the curriculum. They acknowledge that educators are increasingly receptive to the argument that values are not appropriately taught as a separate discipline. Consequently, they examine the ways in which values relate to the understanding and appreciation of their own cultures and those of others, as well as their value to the community.

Teaching to Multiple Intelligences

The teaching strategies are required to address the multiple intelligences of students and acknowledge the specific talents, abilities and aptitudes of individual students in order to achieve optimal accessibility to knowledge acquisition, understanding, , and skills development. Gardner (1999) reviewed his theory of multiple intelligences and described eight autonomous aptitudes or intelligences through which individuals learned. Originally seven intelligences were described (Gardner, 1983). These were: linguistic, logical, spatial, bodily kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences. More recently Gardner included an eighth intelligence, a naturalistic intelligence; and also canvassed the possibility of further intelligences such as spiritual and existential intelligences (Gardner, 1999). Spiritual intelligence referred to

mythology, religious beliefs and their expression in the arts. Existential intelligence referred to issues such as the place of the individual in the cosmos. Gardner acknowledged that such spiritual and existential intelligences did not meet his criteria for description as intelligences that were informed by logical analysis, developmental psychology and psychological research.

Gardner (1983) claimed that an intellectual competence must include problem solving skills that enable individuals to solve problems and to find or create products. A prerequisite for a theory of multiple intelligences was that the intelligences were required to reflect the whole range of abilities valued by human cultures. Gardner (1983) provided eight signs that represented the criteria for a faculty or an aptitude to be considered intelligence. These eight signs are:

- (a) potential isolation by brain damage,
- (b) the existence of idiot savants, prodigies, and other exceptional individuals,
- (c) an identifiable core of operation or set of operations,
- (d) a distinctive developmental history, along with a definable set of expert 'end-state' performances,
- (e) an evolutionary history and evolutionary plausibility,
- (f) support from psychological tasks,
- (g) support from psychometric findings, and
- (h) susceptibility to encoding in a symbol system.

Critics of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences such as Alix (2000) argued that it did not meet criteria for theoretical adequacy, or methodological validity and reliability in application. Nevertheless, as a strategy for accessing the inherent talents and abilities of children to generate learning, Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences changed the direction of instruction from one that was focused predominantly on linguistic and mathematical conceptualisation, to one in which the application of these skills and others were integrated within a broader learning context. The theory of multiple intelligences supported the view that there were other valid and significant areas of learning, performing and ultimately working in the vocational sense, such as the arts or team membership. The contemporary dynamic social changes described by Delors (1996), and the consequent vocational demands for a versatile workforce covering a broad range of professions, demanded a wide range of skills and knowledge as well as linguistic, mathematical and scientific competencies. The implementation of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences should be fostered for both the immediate learning process of students, and as a preparation for a future vocational application.

The following brief description of Gardner's (1999) eight intelligences includes examples of relevant teaching strategies used by Teacher A in the ESL Kindergarten class in School A, Teacher B in the integrated Year 1-2 class in School B; and the learning environment of School C, that according with strategies for teaching to multiple intelligences described by Armstrong (2000).

Linguistic intelligence is the capacity to learn and appreciate language, and to use language as a means of achieving designated goals. Examples from the schools studied are: storytelling, brainstorming and video-making; recall writing; and the publication of class work on the classroom computer. These examples are considered open-ended and therefore accessible to a wide range of learners.

Logical-mathematical intelligence involves the capacity to analyse, investigate and carry out mathematical operations. Strategies include using calculations, classifications and categorisations

such as in numeracy exercises relevant to the literacy lesson; and counting backwards and forwards from the present day's date.

Spatial intelligence involves the capacity to recognise and manipulate space, in both its widest parameters such as that used by aeronautical engineers, and the more confined spaces of artists and artisans. Teaching strategies include reflection in spoken or written narrative; creating a story or craft exercise to be based on imagination or abstract reasoning; and a reading program that includes graphics and colour cues.

Kinaesthetic intelligence concerns the use of the body to produce items such as arts and crafts, sports, and aesthetic activities, for example, (a) walking and skipping along a snake painted on the floor, (b) hands-on learning where children use construction pieces such as blocks, connecting blocks, beads, paper and scissors, and (c) other opportunities for full or part body involvement in action songs and numeracy exercises.

Musical intelligence is the capacity to appreciate, compose and perform musical patterns. Examples include the opportunity to examine musical instruments from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and a reading program which reinforces cultural differences through songs and chants.

Interpersonal intelligence involves the ability to perceive and act upon the intentions and motivations of others. Teaching strategies for interpersonal intelligence are increasingly important in an environment where team work draws experts and artisans from a variety of disciplines. It is also important for developing cross-cultural understanding in the classroom and in the wider society. Examples include peer sharing and group work, and opportunities for interaction with other children through organised activities or outdoor play.

Intrapersonal intelligence is the capacity to understand oneself, such as one's fears, motivations and aspirations, and the application of this understanding in regulating one's life. Examples include one minute reflection periods, recalling and relating experiences, discussing the new task or previous work, and free time to pursue topics of interest.

Naturalistic intelligence is the capacity to recognise and classify species of fauna and flora in one's environment. Strategies include excursions around the local neighbourhood, a visit to a nature park, a section of the classroom dedicated to natural history, and the encouragement of children to take care of their classroom and school environment.

Armstrong (2000) argues that, according to multiple intelligences theory, instructional objectives may be learned through the eight different intelligences and therefore it is possible for teachers to assess children's learning through methods reflecting any one of these eight intelligences. Armstrong presents a detailed model for assessment which he describes as eight ways of assessment. This model provides assessment tools consistent with a competence setting that is most relevant to a learner's individual intelligences. Armstrong recommends: (a) individual student portfolios with assessment based on student work samples; (b) opportunities for students to be assisted in developing their cognition through reflection on their work; (c) communication with all stakeholders in the student's education; (d) group work in the classroom; and (e) a set of criteria for comparison of the student's progress across the grades.

In Teacher A's classroom, assessment reflected Armstrong's recommendations. Portfolios were used by School A in 2002 in accordance with the NSW DET guidelines for outcomes-based assessment (NSW DET 2002). The portfolios were managed by the teachers of the home class kindergartens. They included samples of work carried out in the ESL lessons. In-school literacy and numeracy testing was undertaken in Year 2, and the NSW DET prescribed basic skills tests were carried out in Years 3 and 5. Parent-teacher meetings on student progress involved

conferences with the home class teacher, the ESL teacher, parents and student as the contributing stakeholders in the student's education.

Teacher-Student Communication

Effective learning requires mutual understanding in any communication between the teacher and student(s). In classrooms where the teacher and children share the same first language there is always the possibility that the spoken message may contain subtleties, inferences and ambiguities that affect its reception. In classes where learners come from a non-English speaking background (NESB) students have a prior-learned non-native language that they may use to reason, a bank of culturally learned attitudes and non-verbal signifiers, and limited English, it is an imperative that careful consideration is given to how information is imparted and received by the teacher, the parent or caregiver, and the student.

Verbal Communication

Verbal communication refers to any communication that uses words. This includes the spoken or written word in all its forms. The effective use of verbal communication in primary schools is essentially the spoken word. Language is a semiotic system, a system of signs. It is one of many semiotic systems that cultures use to inform members. Geertz (1973) claims that it is through the trafficking in signs that meaning can be transferred among individuals in any society.

Words, that are symbols used in language, are arbitrary signs until they acquire meaning. In the application of Saussurean linguistic theory, described by Hawkes (1977), words are signs that acquire meaning when used in relation to other words. When these words are strung into a syntax which, because of the selection of signs and their relation to one another produces meaning, they form sentences and utterances with extensive potential depending in scale on the richness of known words. While utterances are restricted by the time it takes for their presentation in a sentence, the written word may not be as severely constrained as evidenced in Asian scripts, or even contemporary Western poetry, or advertising where the relationships between signs may be accessed from a number of directions thereby enriching meaning through connotation (Hawkes, 1977).

Since children, and in fact persons at any age from a NESB background, commence formal education in a Western focused classroom in Australia with a prior learned system of communication, it is important for teachers to understand some of the issues associated with communication in order to generate a general approach to communication with NESB learners. In their discussion of the role of everyday discourse and social interaction in reinforcing values, ideologies and patterns of social organisation, Garret and Baquedano-Lopez (2002) refer to the studies by Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) that young children's socialisation activities with their care-givers leads to the acquisition of social and linguistic skills, and a culturally specific world view.

According to Brown (1974), children between the ages of 18 months and five years acquire a syntactic rule system that enables them to generate linguistic communication through the construction of numerous sentences comprehensible to a variety of community members. Brown argues that children do not learn to remember sentences; they gradually recognise and extract a set of rules of construction which provides them with the skills to produce further sentences. These sentence constructions or patterns are copied from the utterances of adults.

However, the adults do not necessarily understand the abstract constructions of the utterances. Therefore, it may be extrapolated from Brown's argument that since the rules of speech, and the patterns of speech by which children imitate the utterances of adult members of the immediate family, can be learned before commencing formal education, the teacher in a multicultural

classroom may be confronted with a variety of prior-learned syntactic, tonal and rhythmic patterns of language. Moreover, these verbal qualities are likely to be accompanied by culturally acquired gestures and proxemics. Consequently, communication is the most immediate and significant of all teaching processes and practices from the point of the child are perhaps the most challenging for the teacher.

Questioning is perhaps the most difficult form of communication in which teachers engage with their students. In verbal communication where the teacher uses directives, assertions and explanations, the teacher has control over the communication that is chosen to convey the message, its context and its purpose within the assumed comprehension level of the learner. Questioning differs from information presenting utterances in that the communication is controlled more by the student's reception of the question, the student's interpretation of the question, and the student's attitude to the question, all of which are culturally learned. Rhetorical questioning such as "What are you doing?" which might or might not require an answer, is often associated with classroom management and maybe problematic for the NESB learner.

Heath's (1982) cross cultural studies of questioning by white middle class teachers in African-American classrooms, and also with their own children, confirm the complexity in the application of questioning strategies. Heath's findings revealed that children from infancy in white middle class societies learned Western type question rituals using identification type questions such as "What is that?". African-American questioning was used mainly in story-telling, and was more typically used for comparative purposes such as "What's that like?" Heath noted that African-American children did not always have experience in dealing with so-called 'how' and 'why' type questions. Other types of questions that were problematic to African-American children were those that were implied directives, such as "Why don't you get it from the back shelf?", and questions that required learned skills in narrative analysis, such as "Who will help Tim find his way home?" Hansen (1979) referred to Dickeman's (1971) observations that in some societies children learnt early in life not to divulge information, and in other social settings, children refused to answer a question if they believed that the questioner already knew the answer.

Hansen (1979) made the point that it was not possible to understand the exchanges between members of a classroom without knowledge of the cultural repertoire of the participants. Moreover, it was not always possible for a teacher to address the issues of communication with every member of a multicultural classroom. However, the teacher could be cognisant of cultural differences and could make adjustments to the questioning technique accordingly. Heath suggested a two-way path for questioning. This technique recommended that teachers should learn about the forms and functions of questions to which children were accustomed, and should encourage learners to acquire the skills to respond to questions according to the rules of classroom question usage.

Feedback referred to the communication by teachers of their evaluation of the learner's work to the student. Feedback should be used in classrooms as reinforcement of correct responses so that learners were encouraged in their efforts. In their discussion of how people learnt, Bransford et al. (1999) argued that not only did people come to formal learning with pre-existing knowledge, they also possess the capacity that enabled them to access new knowledge through active learning and metacognition. Metacognition referred to knowledge about learning, (a) about one's own learning, (b) about personal strengths and weaknesses, and (c) self-regulation through recognition of what was understood and when more information was required. Metacognition grew gradually with knowledge and experience. Although self-regulation might appear quite early, the ability to reflect on one's acquisition of knowledge would seem to develop at a later stage. Bransford et al. (1999) suggested that teachers could assist children to reflect on their work through activities such as

working with other children on a topic; by reviewing the work of other children; and by positive reinforcement.

Sperber and Wilson (1995, p. 3) described the message contained in communication systems as “a code which pairs messages with signals”. They considered this code model to be relevant to all forms of human communication. However, they argued that the code model of linguistic communication did not adequately account for the gap that might occur between semantic representation of the sentence and the thought that it was intended to convey. Sentences might be ambiguous due to possible influences on the spoken word, such as where a statement might be altered to a question by the upward inflexion of the voice at the end of the utterance. Similarly, the interpretation of the sentence may be affected by other circumstances such as the status of the speaker, the context, or the purpose. Sperber and Wilson described this as the inferential dimension of communication and considered inference as an important aspect of the decoding process.

Consequently, Sperber and Wilson (1995) argued, although individuals might share a language they might not have the same assumptions about the world and the only way to avoid misunderstanding would be to ensure that the contexts of speaker and hearer were identical. Moreover, ambiguity frequently occurred in speaking. Therefore, in order to access the correct message, the recipient needed to decode both the semantic structure of the utterance and the inferential information encoded therein. This would be achieved through choosing the most contextually relevant meaning. Sperber and Wilson (1995) identified two forms of assumption presented in utterances. They were the explicature or explicit communication, and the implicature or implied assumption which was a combination of linguistically encoded and contextually inferred conceptual features. It might be extrapolated that, wherever possible, teachers should use explicature type utterances in order to avoid ambiguity.

Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication might occur in association with spoken language or independently. Kendon (1981, p. 3) described non-verbal communication as:

[the] communicational functioning of bodily activity, gesture, facial expression and orientation, posture and spacing, touch and smell, and of those aspects of utterance that can be considered apart from the referential content of what is said.

Human verbal utterances may be understood in a variety of ways because in most cases more than one semiotic system is being invoked at any time. For example, the words in a sentence, spoken or written, are influenced by the context and the purpose of the communication or encounter, so that a constructed statement may inform, question, order, or contain subversive information known only to the participants. Utterances may be accompanied by gestures such as wink, fist thumping, and shoulder shrugging. Voice intonation may occur as a whisper, a shout, or be terminally raised. Proxemics includes touching, averting, and standing from being seated.

What is important in the interaction between teacher and learner, particularly the young learner new to formal education, is the disparate status of the child and the teacher. Givens (1981), referred to a study of three to five year olds who, when approached by unknown adults, averted their gaze, and whose heartbeat rates increased accordingly. These examples indicated that gaze aversion was one way that children could control their socially induced stress. Therefore the possibility existed that in the uneven levels of status of teacher-student communication, direct gaze with eye contact might be interpreted as challenging or threatening to the child.

Since gaze is such a forceful form of communication, it is more productive to the learning process for teachers to neutralise this activity as far as possible. An effective strategy for managing gaze

was demonstrated by Teacher B who avoided lifting her gaze to the level of the child's face. Instead, she focused on a point which could be shared with the child such as the book being read, or piece of work being undertaken by the child. In their classrooms both Teacher A and Teacher B maintained the height of their seating arrangements consistent with that of the children in any situation where discussion was undertaken. This avoided any implication that the teacher, redolent with authority, was looking down on the children, and enabled the teacher to establish a more egalitarian context in student-teacher interaction.

Sperber and Wilson (1995) described style as the relationship between a speaker and his or her assumptions about the listener. It is a response to what the speaker considers to be the cognitive capacity and attention span of the hearers, and how much guidance is required by the hearers. Teachers constantly monitor their students and since they continually adapt their utterances to suit their classes, they select the most effective style of communication.

SUMMARY

The five topics that grouped the identified successful teaching processes and practices for Australian multicultural classrooms are reorganised in this article into two student-focused themes for discussion. The two themes are: the learning environment and student-teacher communication. The theme of the learning environment describes scaffolding and transfer as methods of instruction; holistic learning as a method of knowledge organisation and interpretation, including values education; and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences as a strategy to address the individual talents and abilities of students. The theme of communication is sub-divided into verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication includes: a) prior-learned language; (b) language as a semiotic system; (c) questioning; (d) feedback; and (e) inference and ambiguity. Non-verbal communication includes: a) gesture; (b) voice intonation, (c) proxemics and gaze.

The identified successful teaching processes and practices are discussed in this article in the context of relevant educational, psychological and anthropological research and discourse with relevant examples of successful teaching strategies. This discussion constitutes a guide for teaching in an Australian multicultural classroom. These identified successful pedagogical processes and practices recognise, acknowledge, and value the cultural diversity of an Australian classroom. In doing so, they support each child's endeavour to meet prescribed syllabus outcomes by developing his or her innate potential and by building on early learning. These strategies prepare all children for lifelong learning by providing them with basic skills.

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