

Controversial issues in multicultural secondary classroom discussions

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ATEE Annual Conference 2018

ABSTRACT BOOK



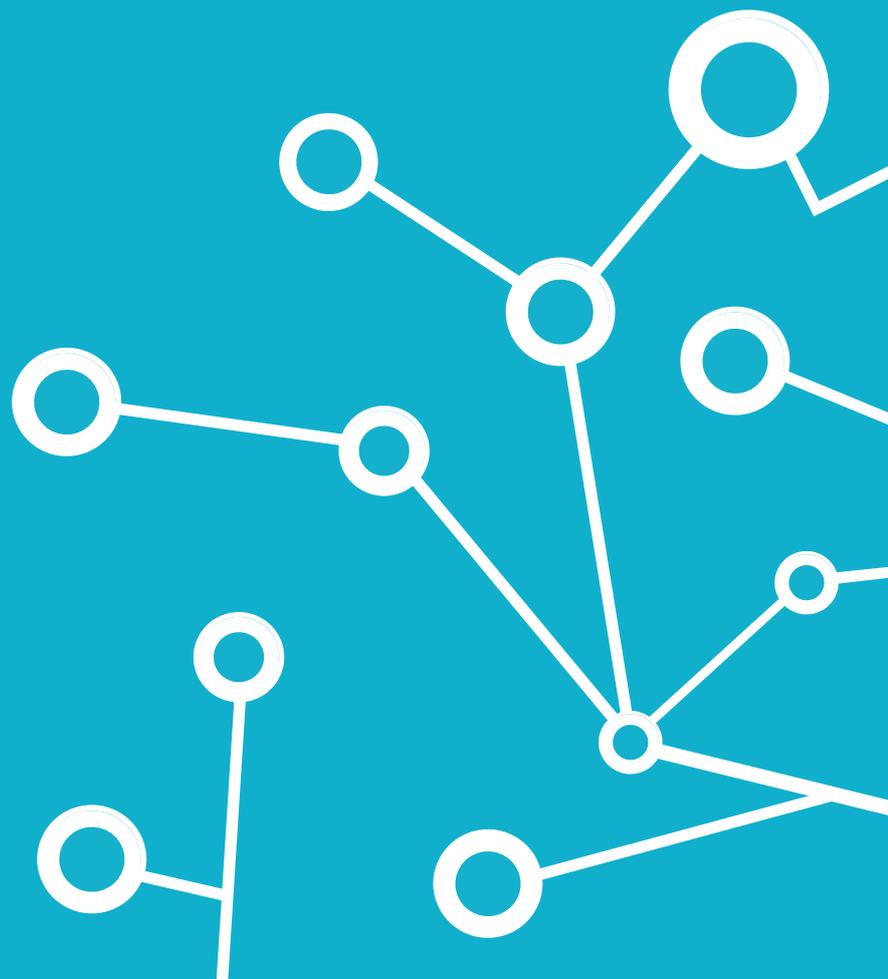
ATEE

Association for Teacher Education in Europe

A Future for All

Teaching for a Sustainable Society
20th – 22nd August 2018

University of Gävle
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A Future for All
Teaching for a Sustainable Society

Abstract Book

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Knowledge, Power and Education for Equity

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The commonly to Sir Francis Bacon attributed Latin aphorism ‘scientia potentia est’ (knowledge is power) can be interpreted in various ways. For instance, it can be understood as an expression implying that obtaining knowledge involves increasing power. Critical scholars emphasize that the phrase also implies that the ones constructing knowledge are in power, making official knowledge a reflection of mainstream, dominant and established views, truths and beliefs (Apple, 2014; Banks, 1993). Especially related to education, a third way to interpret this phrase underlines the power relations between students and teachers or teacher educators: the ones holding and transmitting knowledge (the teachers and teacher educators) are in power over the ones receiving knowledge (the students). Like the before mentioned option, this third alternative needs critical examination for it increases unequal and unjust educational practices.

Questions and considerations related to knowledge on the one hand and power relations between students and teacher educators on the other hand emerged from our series of small scaled, narrative researches as well. The empirical parts of our studies aimed to explore meanings both teacher educators and students gave to new approaches to teaching that strove to open up new possibilities for students by creating room for students to find their own routes. One of the dilemma’s and difficul-

ties the participants experienced refers to this imbalance that might occur due to the transmission of knowledge, making teacher educators hesitant to lecture their students. Therefore, this theoretical paper, being a part of our entire research that aims to enrich both theoretical insights on education for equity and educational practice by building bridges between both stances, explores ways to overcome this experienced dilemma by presenting theoretical insights on education for equity, power relations, and knowledge.

First of all, we will present Paulo Freire’s ideas on (and against) the banking concept of education, where teaching becomes an act of depositing, students are depositories and teachers the depositors, making the teacher and his knowledge the one in power over the students (Freire, 2000). Freire transforms this banking concept of education into joint praxis in which both teachers and students are involved in collective inquiry. Besides Freire, we will also present the work of Jacques Rancière who in a way shifts the attention from the power of the teacher and his or her knowledge to the teacher’s assumption of (in) equality as the major (dis)incentive for emancipation and education for equity (Rancière, 1991). In our conclusion we will discuss the potential of Rancière’s assumption of equality for the dilemma’s our research participants experienced.

Controversial issues in multicultural secondary classroom discussions

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This study is part of a two-year research project regarding discussion of controversial issues in multicultural secondary classroom. The aim of the study was to develop lesson plans and strategies to help teachers prepare and lead classroom discussions in order to foster knowledge, attitudes and skills for democratic citizenship. Controversial issues cause heated emotionally engaged discussions because they touch upon cardinal moral values directly relating to students’ personal identities. As such, we argue, they form unique opportunities for teachers to teach and foster democratic citizenship among students. Many teachers claim to have regular discussions with their

students, but in effect only teach them how to formulate their opinion without having deep discussions (Avery, Levy, & Simmons, 2013). Deeply engaging discussions share the characteristics with what Michaels, O’Connor and Resnik (2008) term ‘accountable talk’. They increase the knowledge, actuate learning from each other through perspective taking and develop critical thinking and language skills, which enhance communication between different perspectives and opinions. Anderson, Chapin and O’Connor (2011) developed productive talk moves for teachers to help students develop skills and attitudes through formulating their own opinion, listening and

responding to their peers, and deepening their reasoning about issues relevant to democratic citizenship. The research question of this study was: what lesson materials help teachers lead discussions on controversial issues in order to foster democratic citizenship among their students?

Participants included eleven teachers from four different inner-city multicultural secondary schools and their students. Lessons and strategies were developed in collaboration with three of the eleven teachers. The collected data consisted of videoed lessons (N= 44), lesson observations, lesson evaluations by teachers and by students, and interviews with the teachers and students. Results showed

that teachers differed greatly in their ability to discuss controversial issues with their students. This became apparent in observations and interviews. Only a few seized the opportunity to deepen the discussion through asking follow-up questions. Furthermore, from the observations and interviews with teachers, it also became apparent that the lessons and strategies helped the teachers in preparing and leading classroom dialogues. This study adds to the current discussion on controversial issues in multicultural secondary classrooms. Lessons and teaching strategies were developed to aid teachers in leading classroom discussions

Developing intergroup empathy in a study group of Israeli Jewish and Arab in-service teachers

Olzan Goldstein, Kaye Academic College of Education, Israel

The presentation describes the process of socialization in a multicultural group of Israeli Jewish and Arab in-service teachers who studied in a Master's degree program in Kaye College of Education in Israel, which is located fairly near the border of Gaza. The program emphasizes collaboration and communication in our globalized and multicultural society as one of the important 21st century skills. It includes visits to Jewish and Arab schools, collaborative learning in multicultural groups, and social events devoted to familiarizing the in-service teachers with the different cultures. At times, the Israeli-Arab conflict complicated intercultural relations in the group. The research examined the group discourse during two semesters, the second of which coincided with a period of conflict escalation between Israel and Gaza. Due to rocket attacks from Gaza, all the studies were transferred to distance online learning. The Israeli-Arab conflict causes isolation between Jews and Arabs. Alienation between groups and especially groups that are in conflict prevents dialogue and understanding between people (Gleizer, 2015). The absence of dialogue between people reinforces stereotypes and thus increases the feeling of rejection and hatred. Close communication and shared goals, however, support the development of human relations between people. Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory describes five conditions for developing intergroup empathy: equal status; common goals; intergroup cooperation; support of authorities, law or customs; and personal interaction.

The research is based on a discourse analysis of the WhatsApp group conversation of the in-service teachers (11 Jews and 12 Arabs). The corpus of 7576 Hebrew messages during the first two semesters of the study was chosen for content analysis. The analysis of the messages revealed three types of discourse: learning (focused on content and organizational issues), social-emotional (focused on in-group relations), and reaction to external events. Following the intensive interactions in the first semester, the group was socialized and developed intergroup empathy. During the period of tension, both Jews and Arabs continued to converse: they condemned violence, shared their fears of rocket attacks, and cared and supported each other emotionally.

The process can be understood in light of the Allport's five conditions for developing intergroup empathy. The students in both groups are experienced in-service teachers, all having the same goal to succeed in their Master's degree program. They studied collaboratively and participated in learning and social events that were intentionally planned to fit the vision of the program. They frequently interacted face-to-face as well as online. Due to globalization and migration, the population of many countries has become multicultural. These findings can promote understanding of the process which connects people in a multicultural society.