

Pedagogy for the Well-being of Students and Instructors in the Culturally Diverse Postsecondary Classroom

Helen Lepp Friesen (University of Winnipeg)

Abstract

Every year more than 130,000 international students come to Canadian universities to study (Canadian Citizenship and Immigration Resource Center Inc., 2011; Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2011). The multicultural milieu on Canadian university campuses consists of international students that are new to the country, descendants of immigrants, Aboriginal students and white students that are born and raised in Canada. Despite Canada's Multiculturalism Act of 1971 and despite anti-racism initiatives on university campuses, Tator and Henry (2010) say that "everyday racism in the academy heightens one's sense of vulnerability and affects one's sense of self esteem and personal self-confidence" (p. 371).

While the contemporary framing of education claims to be neutral and all-inclusive, it is in fact laden with values and assumptions that may marginalize a segment of the postsecondary student population. Although we valiantly attempt to address the notion of plurality, our definition and goal of being an educated person is still set in a prescribed form with certain content. Journalist Giroday (2012) says that in Canada, the province of Manitoba has the second highest number of reported hate crimes in 2010 and most of the reported incidents were race related. Therefore, cross-cultural competency and sensitivity would appear to be an essential component in today's multicultural work, academic, and social environment.

To address ESWBRG's objective of promoting education for sustainable well-being as inclusive of formal, nonformal, and informal education, this reflective presentation will feature practical skills that I, as an academic writing instructor, implement in my classroom that hopefully reflect a human rights perspective and a transformative learning framework. I will talk about how I incorporate drama, poetry, improvisation, public speaking, field trips, music, and photography in my classes to empower students that learn, define, and exhibit knowledge in different ways than I do. These activities can be implemented not only in a culturally diverse postsecondary academic writing classroom, but in other classrooms as well. This presentation focuses on how we as educators in a university setting can be instrumental in disassembling the walls that separate formal and informal learning, with the intent of sustainable well-being.