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Cross Cultural Classroom Study

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Cross Cultural Classroom Study
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Department of Education

Honors Research Project

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Abstract

Researchers and educators have always tried to find which practices are most effective when delivering instruction in the classroom. How instruction is delivered can affect students in a positive or negative way. Students learn various learning techniques in order to better their understanding of the information under study in their classroom. How instruction should be delivered is always under research. Research tells us that differentiating instruction to tailor the needs of each student is an effective technique.

To positively contribute to students' development, teachers must take time to scaffold students in order to link prior knowledge to new information under study. Teachers in the United States and developing countries across the world tailor to different student audiences which leads to different ways instruction in the classroom is delivered. Research says that schools in the United States have developing diverse classrooms. Schools need to have experienced teachers who promote learning through integrating different cultural practices in the classroom in order to connect prior learning to new information under study. I attended a service project over winter break where we worked in a variety of classroom with teachers and students. This service project gave me the opportunity to study how teachers in a different culture tailored and delivered their instruction to their students.

The teachers shared how they prepare and reflect on their lessons. Students at his school have the opportunity to learn different subject areas such as advanced mathematics, Spanish, and English. Our group did not change the world by helping this school in Haiti, but did help better ourselves by emerging our lives into a different culture in order to better our understanding of a different country.

Introduction

Haiti is an island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean Sea. This island is estimated to be an equivalent size to the state of Maryland of The United States (Coupeau, 2008). Haiti is inhabited by African-Caribbean people, with a history of French Colonialism (Corbett). This island holds an estimate of 10 million people, many of which live in poverty stricken areas (“Haiti” Central). The education system has been a challenge to build due to the large amount of poverty within the country of Haiti. Haitian teachers are challenged in their classrooms every day to alter the teaching strategies in order to improve their students’ ability to comprehend material and concepts.

Purpose of Study

In order to implement different strategies into the classroom for students to gain greater comprehension of material, teacher must study a variety of practice. Classrooms in America are full of diverse learners. In order to serve each student as an individual learner it is important to differentiate instruction and tailor to different learning styles in the classroom. To strengthen my knowledge in education and implementing comprehension strategies I have completed an independent research project that focuses on how a specific group of teachers implement a specific teaching strategy into their classroom. The focus groups of teachers used in this paper are of Haitian descent and range between the ages of 20 to 50. The purpose of this research focusing on this specific population was to gain a greater understanding of how teachers differentiate instruction in a culture that was not my own, while still observing teaching strategies that were familiar to me. The goal of this research was to gain a greater understanding

how to differentiate instruction based on cultural background. The theory focused on in this research that Haitian and American teachers use to develop and implement instructional practices, is Bloom's Taxonomy.

Review of Literature

One theory teachers learn about in their undergraduate teacher education training is Bloom's Taxonomy. Bloom's Taxonomy is a theory developed by Benjamin Bloom in 1956 that defines six levels of cognitive processes (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation). Bloom originally developed these levels for teachers to have educational objectives that have hierarchal organization for their students. Bloom's taxonomy is also used as an evaluation tool to measure how well in the information was presented and how well the students comprehended the information.

Throughout time educators came into problems with the theory due to its lack of structure. Bloom's original theory left highly trained educators "unable to recognize questions at higher levels as more difficult questions at lower levels of the taxonomy" due to the lack of facts and concepts educators were taught. After years of attempts to fix the problems within the theory, Bloom's Taxonomy was finally revised in 2001. The new levels of cognitive processes (remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate create) are made for teachers to have a clearer understanding on how to develop critical thinking within their classrooms. To develop the revision correctly researchers looked at Bloom's own criticisms about the theory. "The major differences lie in the more useful and comprehensive additions of how the taxonomy intersects and acts upon different types and levels of knowledge — factual, conceptual, procedural and metacognitive (Krathwohl, 2002)."

Teachers still use Bloom's taxonomy today because the theory helps guide teachers into getting their students to the highest form of comprehension due to the strategic levels of different types of knowledge that can be displayed through fact, concepts, and procedures. Bloom's Taxonomy can be applied to any classroom in any part of the world since it is developed based off of education research and theory, not culture. Developing a correct sequence of questions/activities to administer in the classroom to develop a gradual level of comprehension in students is the challenging part of using Bloom's Taxonomy since teachers must know each of their students' learning strengths and weakness in order to create and develop different levels of comprehension questions/activities. Due to the fact that every classroom is different, every teacher must administer Bloom's Taxonomy in a different way within the classroom. Every student in the classroom has a different history. As a teacher, it is important to get to know each student in order to learn how the student learns best as well as their previous knowledge and what support they have at home.

Methods

From January 13th to 16th of 2016 I participated in a naturalistic observation of five different classrooms located at Institution Univers, in Ouanaminthe, Haiti. During my time in the classroom I observed how each teacher implemented Bloom's taxonomy within their lessons. After each of the classes had concluded I was able to complete an interview with each of the teachers. All of the teachers asked the same questions. Since there was a language barrier a translator was with me during my observation and interview to translate as needed.

Findings

On January 13, 2016 I observed a seventh grade classroom. During at the time of my

observation there were 35 students within the classroom. They began going over their math lesson when the teacher had them take out their materials and place them on their desks. The teacher asked the students multiple questions, which the students responded to as a group. The teacher then had the students work on a problem that was located in their book. He walked around the room to look at how students were progressing. The teacher would then complete the problem himself on the chalkboard and explain it step by step. Once the teacher completed this exercise two or three times, he then put a problem on the board and had a student complete it. Once again the teacher went around assessing how the rest of the students were doing in the class. When the student at the board was having difficulties with the problem the teacher would have the class help out the student. The teacher did this exercise with two other different students. Once all three problems were completed on the board the teacher would ask them questions about the problem, which the students would respond by shouting back the answers. Throughout the class there were multiple times when the teacher would stop and explain how to solve a problem to a student who was struggling. Before concluding the class, the teacher evaluated the students' work and reviewed material on the board.

Once the class was completed I had the opportunity to interview the teacher about his knowledge of Bloom's Taxonomy. As a result of the interview, I had found out during the interview that this specific teacher had studied math and physics for elementary students at Cfece (Haiti's main city-center of elementary studies). The teacher went on to tell me that he was familiar with the study of Bloom's taxonomy and that he did try to implement the strategy within his classroom. He further explained that in the beginning of the year he asked his class what they remembered from past math classes. He then took their answers and evaluated what they really

knew. The math teacher explained to me that he aide's students by creating figures on the board to ensure they understand. He also does stop if the class does not understand the material and decides to explain the concept in a different way. This math teacher does brainstorm how the students learn best and formulates critical thinking questions outside of the classroom upon evaluating how that day's class went. The teacher explained that he does sometimes has to tailor different questions to different students if they are slower to the material. To assess his students, he has his students ask him questions about the material, and he creates assessments based off of their questions.

The next class I observed was an eleventh grade math class. This class was very familiar to the math class I had just observed. This teacher had students working at problems in their seats when he called students to the board to work out specific problems. What was interesting about this teacher was his knowledge of Bloom's I had discovered during his interview. This particular teacher had also studied at a Haitian University and has been teaching for six years. This math teacher explained in his interview that he understands that there are three levels of students and that a teacher must use different teaching techniques in order to achieve the highest level of comprehension. In order to implement Bloom's into the classroom, this particular teacher uses grouping exercises and on-going assessments. He went on to explain that he pushes his students to have the mindset that they can create something using what they had learned in his class. This math teacher explained that at the end of a unit he pushes his students to create something using their point of view of the material that was presented to them. To prepare them for this level of comprehension, he sends his students home to think about twenty questions and evaluations they had about the material.

On January 14, 2016 I observed three different early education classrooms. I first observed a third grade classroom. When I began observing this classroom the teacher was in the middle of a science lesson. He wrote on the board and asked the students questions. They all responded by shouting out the answers as a group. I took notice during this lesson that the teacher was using graphing concepts, such as plotting points in order to solve an equation, to help the students categorize the concept. The teacher then had them chorally read the board to finish the graph. Once the graph was complete the teacher walked around the classroom to make sure all students were on track.

The teacher then moved on to their French lesson. He first wrote the verb conjugation “to be” and “have” on the board in French. He also wrote the conjugation for “I sing” and underlined certain words in the phrases for the students to focus on. The teacher wrote three forms of the conjugations for the students to tell him what they were. The students responded chorally in a song-like fashion. The teacher then increased the difficulty of the material and used the conjugation with the phrases he wrote on the board. The teacher first started with the future tense. The students chorally sang for the second and third conjugation forms. Once the students had completed the majority of the conjugations the teacher then had certain students stand up and present the verb as well as its conjugation to the class. When the teacher came across a student who was unsure of the material he would review the conjugation with the whole class then have that one student present to him once again. When the teacher saw the student did still not understand he would ask the class, the class would answer, and the teacher would rephrase the question to try and have the focused student answer.

The next class I observed was a kindergarten class. This class contained fifty three-year

olds. There were three long tables in the classroom where each student had an assigned seat. The teacher began her lesson by singing a song was about the different directions (next to, behind, in front of). She then placed a bin in front of the class and had a student stand next to, in front of, and behind the bin. The student chorally said the sentence “she is _____ the bin” to every direction the teacher had her stand. The teacher did the same exercise with the student in front of the desk and the classroom door. The teacher would prompt her students to answer by saying ‘She is _____.’ After the lesson was completed the teacher gave her students positive reinforcement by having the whole class applaud. The teacher then continued the same lesson in a different way. She moved to her desk and asked her students where certain items (like a pencil, tape, eraser) were on her desk. For this particular exercise the teacher would ask one student to stand up and ask them the questions.

Once this lesson was over the teacher moved on and sang a song about the months of the year with her students. The students clapped their hands and used hand motions while singing. The teacher went over a shape song and drew a square on the board. She told the class “This is a square.” The students then would repeat the phrase. The students then drew an imaginary square with their fingers while the teacher gave the direction on the board. She then began to draw a triangle on top of the square and a rectangle to represent a door. The teacher had them repeat the phrase “This is a ___” until they went through all of the shapes. The teacher had the students sing a song about the different parts of their body. The students pointed to the parts as they sang the appropriate part of the song. The teacher then drew a face on the board with missing body parts for her students to fill in and asked the students what was missing in the face.

During her interview she informed me that she had been teaching for eighteen years and

is familiar with Bloom's Taxonomy. This kindergarten teacher explained to me that she tries to break down the information she is presenting to her students every day. She always repeats and rephrases information to ensure all students in the classroom are receiving the information to the best of their ability. To measure their comprehension level of the material, the teacher prepares two different assessments a month. She tests her students verbally and traditionally using pencil and paper. Sometimes the students are able to create their own assessment by drawing a picture. This teacher tries to create critical thinking questions at home and individualize her instruction when it is needed.

The last observation was in a first grade classroom. The students were in an English lesson. The teacher was going around checking their work and giving them tips while they worked. The sentence was on the board so the students could use it as a reference while they were writing. When a student was really struggling, the teacher would write on the students' paper. They then moved on to math. The teacher started drawing a table on the board and asked the students to say the numbers on the chart together. He then asked one student at a time to come up and solve one of the problems to fill in a square in the table. By observation, it was clear he had taught them different techniques for learning how to add numbers. The most common method the students used was drawing tally marks to represent each number and then counting the tallies to get the sum. When a student had an incorrect answer the teacher would break it down how to solve the problem with the class helping behind them. After the chart was complete the teacher would say "6+6" and they would say "6+6=12" until they went through the entire chart. He then erased the answers on the chart and had them repeat the choral exercise.

During this teacher's interview he informed me that he had been teaching since 1996 and

that he has taught up to the fifth grade. The first grade teacher explained to me that he understood that Bloom's was a method of teaching. He went on to tell me that he does use specific materials for struggling students to help them gain a higher level of comprehension. To measure the student's level of comprehension he performs ongoing assessment throughout the year. He strives his best to create authentic assessments and to have students create their assessments to the best of their abilities. Before he begins his school year, he presents a summary to the students of information they had previously learned. He incorporates poems, songs, and real-life applications. Before he come to class he creates critical thinking questions, and places them on a tentative schedule based on evaluations of the student's understandings. The goal in this teacher's classroom is to put the students in a place where they can react to the information being presented in front of them.

Conclusions

From this independent research it can be concluded that this particular school in Haiti implements Bloom's taxonomy to the best of their ability. When observing the 7th grade classroom it was observed the teacher was using Bloom's Taxonomy. The teacher began with review questions at the beginning of class, observed students' work throughout the class, and asked them increasingly difficult questions throughout the class period. The teacher would use resources in the classroom such as a ruler, the textbook and fellow classmates to aide in a deeper comprehension in the class. The seventh grade teacher made the students reflect on their math problem, aide one another in learning, and facilitated critical thinking questions to aide his students in understanding.

The eleventh grade math class had familiar findings. This particular teacher lectured,

asked critical thinking questions, and used the resources in his classroom to gradually have his students increase their level of comprehension in the subject area. It was the interview of the eleventh grade teacher that truly caught my eye. It was prevalent to see that his teacher, to his best ability, used Bloom's in the classroom by evaluating the different levels of his students, developing methods to aide in increasing their comprehension level, and analyzing ways in order to better their understanding. This teacher informed me of familiar strategies, such as grouping and on-going assessment, to increase student comprehension.

Bloom's Taxonomy was evident in the classroom when strategies such as graphing concepts and choral reading were also seen during the observation. The third grade teacher who had scaffolded the students to learn a specific conjugation had broken down the information, had the students say it together, and then asked individual students to say it. When students were struggling with the material the teacher would rephrase the question or have the other students help aide the individual student to get the answer by chorally reviewing the material.

During the Kindergarten observation the teacher used sing-song techniques and then had the students apply that information to questions she would ask after completing the song. This technique was effective because the students had a physical and musical component to reference when the teacher was asking them comprehension questions. Bloom's Taxonomy was distinctly prevalent when the teacher led the class in the body song, drew a face on the board, asked them what the body parts were, erased some, and then asked students what body parts were missing. She scaffolded her lesson by first reviewing the information they knew, and then was less and less involved as she continued throughout the lesson. During this activity the teacher was able to observe what students knew the material and scaffold them to higher comprehension of the

material until they would be able to make their own drawing of faces and label them correctly.

Bloom's Taxonomy was also prevalent during the first grade classroom observation. The teacher increased the level of difficulty when the students were filling in the chart by first having students demonstrate how to fill it in, having the students read it as a class with the answers on the board, then the students reading the chart without the answers on the board. The tailored instruction to ensure every student reached full comprehension was prevalent in the classroom when a student was struggling, or not participating in the classroom. This particular teacher used on-going assessment techniques though the school year to evaluate his students' comprehension levels in order to create critical thinking activities and questions in order to increase their comprehension level.

Teachers at this particular Haitian school implemented Bloom's Taxonomy to their greatest ability. These teachers used techniques such as grouping, choral reading, and kinesthetic learning in order to deepen their students in their comprehension levels. Each of these teachers plan accordingly for their classes by analyzing their students' comprehension levels during class, then planning critical thinking questions and activities for their students to grow in their level of comprehension.

What stuck out the most in observation was how the teachers implemented Bloom's Taxonomy within the classroom with a lack of resources to facilitate activities. In the classroom observations the students were facilitated to reach the highest levels of comprehension by working together. When a teacher would ask the students review questions, they would all answer as a class. When the teacher wanted the students to read something off the board or answer another peer's questions, the teacher would direct the class to answer as a unit. Students

in the classrooms responded positively and energetically when told to answer as a unit. Students would respond with such enthusiasm that they could be heard in the hallway with the door closed as well as in other classrooms.

Teachers at Institution Unvers taught these students that they are held accountable for their education and to work together in order to learn. This type of teaching resembles what American teachers teach their students. In America, teachers facilitate activities in order for students to learn from each other. Teachers also take the role of more of a facilitator over a teacher to teach students to be accountable for their learning. To add a different style of teaching into the classroom, American teachers could implement techniques/strategies Haitian teachers use in order to have their students reach full comprehension levels. An example of a strategy Haitian teachers use that American teachers could implement is choral instruction/responses from students. Choral responses are used as an assessment tool in America, and give students the opportunity to chime in when they feel most comfortable. It is possible that using choral responses during the instruction process could help students develop a more concrete understanding of the knowledge being presented to them.

Implementations of Research/Professional Development

Interacting with teachers from different cultures is an important component to become a well-rounded teacher. America is a melting pot full of different students with different backgrounds. To be a successful teacher, it is important to learn about each student's background in order to connect the material being presented to them to their lives to build upon previously learned knowledge, as well as how each student learns best. Learning different perspectives and techniques can only better teachers because they only learn how to better their classroom. All

students are different and are in need of tailored instruction in order to gain the highest level of comprehension levels as possible. Teachers who adopt different strategies from teachers around them, but also around the world are more likely to become successful in administering a well-rounded classroom. The difference in the classrooms comes from what resources are available and how teachers use their resources to the best of their ability. Teachers in Haiti do use the same basis as American teachers by implementing methods such as Bloom's taxonomy. It is evident that Bloom's Taxonomy can be implemented in a variety of classrooms no matter where the teacher and students are in the world.

After completing this research, it can be concluded that additional research can be made in order to gain further understanding on how to differentiate instruction. Additional research could be made by spending consistent time in a specific classroom over a period of time so an entire unit plan can be observed and taught using Bloom's Taxonomy. Other research that could be done is observing video recordings of teachers of different countries teaching in classrooms. Technology allows classrooms as well as teachers to connect in order to incorporate differentiated instruction. Taping videos of lessons and sharing them with teachers across the world is another platform that would allow teachers to gain professional development in researching differentiated instruction techniques. As a teaching professional it is important to keep up to date with changes within the education world and share ideas with other teachers in order to implement different teaching strategies into the classroom. It is important to share ideas with other professionals and continue to grow as a professional in order to tailor to different learning styles that are in the classroom.

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