

**Identity, Misconceptions, and Stereotyping:
A Curricular Mini-Unit Based on the Human Relations Approach**

Lauren Ashley Brown

CI 241

May 15, 2013

This spring, I introduced a curricular mini-unit on the concepts of identity, misconceptions, and stereotyping using the Human Relations approach before embarking on a ~~more~~ significant Heritage unit with my third grade class. Throughout the year I gravitated towards lessons that encouraged my students to treat each other equitably and justly, but a recent series of events on campus have exposed a need for improved dialogue, positive relationship-building, and the promotion of self-worth on campus. The Human Relations approach targets these areas specifically and best fit my desire to promote constructive relationships and communication between students. This unit in particular seemed like an organic extension of my work to-date and struck me personally and professionally as the most beneficial means of addressing a recurring problem in the comfortable atmosphere of my classroom.

*Clear, important,
concrete unit
HR*

As an international school, building and maintaining a supportive learning environment that cherishes students' individuality and diversity is paramount, and the Heritage unit represents a prime opportunity to celebrate culture, diversity, and ancestry. This unit is unquestionably the most important of the school year in Social Studies and remains a special and much-anticipated time for students to recognize and value the wide variety of backgrounds and ethnicities represented in their classroom. Students wear traditional clothing, and share food, music, games and traditions of their people and culture throughout the unit and at the culminating banquet we host for other classes and parents.

This year, however, I chose to introduce a series of lessons on misconceptions, stereotyping, identity, and prejudice as a precursor to this special unit based on some unflattering observations of students around campus. As an international school, this school site is a revolving door of new students moving from country to country, with students enrolling as late as April. Many of the newer class members this spring were unaware of class rules and

procedures as well as the established and respectful way students address each other around school and in the classroom. A handful of new students spread among the primary grades displayed mannerisms that drew criticism from grade-level peers, ^{including...} Their tendency to spend time only with members of their own race fueled further distrust, frustration, and communication problems.

Provide illustrations examples documents resources.

The symptoms worsened in a matter of weeks, and students began spending more time in isolated pods on the playground that rarely interacted or played together. Both on and off the soccer field, the "Korean Killers" and "Indonesian Warriors" began to hate each other. This scenario, which may ~~seem typical~~ ^{infrequently occur} for an elementary school, is highly unusual for this particular close-knit school environment. More children were teased to tears, and mothers became concerned. The deteriorating situation furnished the perfect opportunity to introduce a unit that would highlight the importance of recognizing and respecting differences and treating one another equitably without sacrificing self image or identity.

The Curriculum Unit

In the case of this curriculum unit, the teaching approach utilized and the importance of the content itself outshined individual lessons taught. With the infiltration of new students, new racial dynamics and confusion in the primary grades, students at the school site were beginning to reach crisis mode. ^S Selecting not only lessons but the means in which those lessons would be conducted was critical. After careful reflection on various approaches to teaching, the Human Relations approach clearly resonated as the best possible means of promoting positive feelings among students, reducing stereotyping, and improving overall self-concept.

Again, provide examples

The Human Relations Approach

In its purest design and implementation, the Human Relations approach involves two equally specific goals for student learning. The first key element is teaching students to feel good about themselves and the distinguishing qualities or (physical) characteristics that make them unique to any group; this self worth is invaluable but should not come at the expense of others (Grant & Sleeter, 2009). The second facet of teaching with this approach involves helping students appreciate and engage effectively with people who are different from themselves ethnically, culturally, or personally. Creating an environment in which stereotypes have no basis rather than simply “tolerating” or co-existing with people from different groups is a primary objective (Grant & Sleeter, 2009).

This group of students seemed to be lacking in both of these major areas. Firstly, the students’ self-confidence was rattled by the presence of new students who ultimately intimidated them into feeling inferior. Many of the new students spoke Korean whereas many of the existing students spoke English, Mandarin, or Bahasa Indonesia. Students desperately tried to protect fragile friendships. Feeling a sense of self-worth suddenly came at the expense of peers from other races and backgrounds. And hiding behind peers who both looked and acted similar was a defense mechanism that I had never before witnessed with this group of children.

According to reference group theory, students derive much of their sense of identity from their association with others, beginning in early childhood (Grant & Sleeter, 2009). A person’s self-concept is made through social comparisons both within their immediate associations and with members of other groups (Grant & Sleeter, 2009). While group membership was never a problem in this school, the fact that other students banded together forced students to essentially “choose sides” with like-minded peers and those of their same race. It seems clear why race,

*Well represented
and anchored
accurately to
the literature*

gender, and social class prejudice is primarily described as a “group phenomena” rather than an individual problem (Grant & Sleeter, 2009).

According to *Making Choices for Multicultural Education*, “advocates of the Human Relations approach are particularly concerned about how members of socio-cultural groups view themselves and their place in the world” (Grant & Sleeter, 2009). With the development of this situation, I became a Human Relations advocate trying to help my students discover their place not only as global citizens but as important contributors to our much smaller school community. Normally, a child develops a sense of personal identity first before they become global citizens. However, the unique circumstances of these Third Culture Kids in struggling to define themselves made the lesson objectives more challenging.

Very well documented

Focus for a final project??

The Students: Third Culture Kids

One cannot address this curriculum unit or the importance of the Human Relations approach without first considering the special nature of this student body. This international school located in Jakarta, Indonesia, primarily caters to embassy children from around the globe as well as an expatriate population whose parents are in Southeast Asia for business. Many of the students speak three or more languages and have lived in at least two other countries prior to arriving in Jakarta. They feel nationalistic towards their home countries though many have never lived there. These types of students have been coined “Third Culture Kids,” or TCK, a common phrase used within the international school community to describe students with “detached childhoods,” spread among a variety of cultures (Eidse & Sichel, 2004). The term dates back decades to researchers studying American expatriate children in India (Useem, 1976).

Unfortunately, many TCKs do not connect with the country in which they now live since they know they will not stay (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). The relationships they build with each other can be described as fleeting and superficial (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). These students are, “perpetual outsiders... born in one nation, raised in others, flung into global jet-streams by their parents’ career choices. They shuttle back and forth between nations, languages, cultures, and loyalties” (McCaig, 1992). In dealing with TCK using the Human Relations approach, one must be especially sensitive to the emotional needs of this diverse group.

Many young TCKs struggle with their own identities as traditionally defined by family, friends, country, or school (Eidse & Sichel, 2004). These students view themselves first and foremost as global community members, which serve them well as they traverse the world sharing languages and experiences with new groups every two to three years. However, in my experience, this transience also functions as a defense mechanism. It creates an excuse to feel undervalued and isolated. Students make friends, separate themselves from others, and never fully immerse in the greater learning community. They have no investment in students who they do not personally know. One purpose of this unit was to remind students of their worth, build a sense of unity among the student body, and reiterate the imperative role human relations and healthy communication play in a diverse learning community. Positive interactions between students cannot exist as a luxury but as a necessity (Sleeter and Grant, 2009).

The Lessons

The curriculum mini-unit on identity, misconceptions, and stereotyping was comprised of six lessons spread over the course of two weeks in late April. Four of the lessons taught were loosely based on activities from Sleeter and Grant’s *Turning on Learning*, a fantastic wealth of

powerful explanation of the problem and school remedy.

Project?..?

“Before” and “After” lesson plans designed to target hard-hitting social issues at every grade level. While this third grade class certainly would have benefitted from the variety of presented activities, I sought lessons that would connect my students’ recent school experiences with greater social issues they will face for years to come. While all the lessons were successful, three of six lessons stood out among the rest and will be the focal points of further discussion.

In light of the dramatic scenario unfolding on campus, I wanted to revive trust among students in class that would help eradicate the unfriendly playground environment. Students needed to be reintroduced to a safe space where they could feel comfortable sharing feelings and concerns. One aim of the Human Relations approach “attempts to replace tension and hostility with acceptance and care” (Grant & Sleeter, 2009). Before students could see each other as more than enemies, they first needed to view each other as peers with strengths, talents, and personalities.

The first lesson was loosely based on an art project entitled “Paper Flowers” presented in *Turning on Learning* but was refined for this student body to include a new project. Students created individual ballot-type boxes made from recycled materials that were covered with pictures of favorite places and items that spoke to them as people. Students showed off artistic and thoughtful sides of themselves by creating boxes with a variety of styles, colors, and themes. On the second day, students were invited to write positive, anonymous “put-ups” about each other and drop them in each student box. Oftentimes in third grade, students are reluctant to compliment each other for fear of being teased, but the anonymous forum allowed students to express praise and admiration for each other unreservedly.

Upon viewing the contents of their boxes, I could see students glowing with approval. Boys and girls alike were surprised and delighted by the observations made by their peers. While

this first lesson didn't directly address misconceptions or stereotyping, it better defined how students felt about each other *to* each other, thus opening a new (and positive) line of communication. It boosted confidence and made the children reconsider their negatively held ideas about classmates. Students became slightly more trusting and open to their peers, a first and important step in the unification process.

8
Proceed slowly
and carefully
in the face
of difficult
complex
identity
issues.

The second lesson, however, dealt directly with misconceptions and stereotyping. I passed out a graphic organizer that asked students to guess the kinds of first impressions people whom they have never met might have of them. I encouraged them to list anything, and the results were overwhelmingly positive and almost entirely based on personality traits. Students thought that others would see them as "a cool guy" or a "nice and smart girl," for example. The students did not mention anything about physical features, race, hair color, weight, or height. I then posed the important question: How would you feel if someone (you do not know) assumed things about you based only on your physical appearance? How would you feel if people decide who you are without getting to know you first? All I recall seeing at the time was a sea of blank faces.

I then showed them a long series of slides presented through PowerPoint and asked students to *honestly* list their three very first impressions, even if they were negative or cruel. I reminded students they would not get in trouble and I would not treat them any differently for being honest. The slides included pictures of an angry-looking Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Mulala Yousafzai, Ted Bundy, Margaret Thatcher, Rosalind Brewer, Ibu Raden Kartini of Indonesia, and Nelson Mandela.

We then defined and discussed stereotypes in an open forum seated in a circle. Almost every student could recall a time when someone made a snap judgment without really knowing

them. One perceptive student even connected it to the recent problems around campus. He said, "They don't even know me! They didn't even give me a chance but they thought I was mean." Students also recognized siblings and parents' use of stereotypes and shared them with our "safe circle." Then, to follow up, in a game-style format we sought to disprove any stereotypes students might have made from the slides. For example, many students thought Martin Luther King, Jr. was a criminal, Gandhi a beggar, and Margaret Thatcher a kindly grandmother. Clips of speeches and primary sources were introduced to supplement some slides like that of Nelson Mandela and Malala Yousafzai. The students were mesmerized. *as evidenced by...*

While I am certain students will make unfair judgments at some point the future, this lesson ^{Yes!} reminded them to stop and think before letting appearance dictate their decision-making. They are more likely to get to know the person and gather information before drawing unwarranted conclusions. The lesson was a resounding success.

The following week, I refined a lesson from *Turning on Learning* entitled "Story Quilt" that would help students understand both ancestry and personal identity as defined by culture and background. The lesson overlapped with the beginning of our Heritage unit, so the students had prior knowledge of some important components of culture including attitudes, beliefs, morals, traditions, and language, among others. From their homework, students had prepared bubble maps filled with specific ideas and intangible qualities that made their cultures and families special.

After breaking students into small groups, I had them compare ideas and draw similarities between various families and cultures. Students found more similarities than differences. I also hid a swath of batik cloth, the national fabric and pride of Indonesia, under each desk that I asked

students to find, examine, and compare with their peers. Each piece was magnificent and colorful, utilizing the same color scheme in different patterns and shapes. As a class, we discussed how each student's identity is unique and special, just like each piece of cloth. It is made of the same materials in the same colors, but each is distinct and extraordinary. Students are shaped by diversity with different traditions, families, and cultural experiences, but they all have the same common denominators, the same way batik shares the same color threads. Their families love and protect them. Their cultures make them feel like a part of something special and help shape their identities.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, students had the opportunity to write some specific items from their lists about their identity and ancestry on long colored stripes of paper that were woven together by a team volunteer. These group "weavers," essentially sewed the paper strips together into a class-size quilt that served as both a reminder of each student's unique contribution to the overall piece but also the importance of coexisting together and finding commonalities among differences. This is one essence of the Human Relations approach.

Reflections

This series of lessons pleased me as both an educator and a student myself in the area of Multicultural Education. But after reflecting on the unit as a whole, the importance of individual lesson activities paled in comparison to the importance of the concepts learned. In other words, it was not *how* lessons were learned, but the content of *what* was learned that counted most. Over the course of two weeks, students reshaped behavior, relationships, and self-image. They began viewing each other as peers and friends rather than strangers and released misconceptions long

held of new students. Constructive dialogue was facilitated throughout and then sustained outside the classroom.

Outstanding!

In another lesson from the curricular unit entitled "People Mingle," students from grades two and three learned more about their shared interests and talents by interviewing each other using a bizarre questionnaire. While the lesson itself was outstanding, the results were more so. The playground situation and hostility between groups of students in both grades lightened immediately as students felt more comfortable with each other and less intimidated. I can confidently say that fear no longer dictates the playground.

Next year, this "emotional education" will play a more consistent role in my weekly planning. As Linda Christensen writes in *Teaching for Joy and Justice*, we as teachers shouldn't "build communities instead of working on academics. We build communities while we work on academics" (p. 15). Multicultural education tools should not be dusted off and used once a year but should represent a significant part of our students' daily education and worked into all content areas. I think the failure to do so was ultimately the cause of this school's digression.

I would also like to mention that this unit sharpened my sense of personal responsibility in the classroom as well as the direction I would like to take my budding career in education. Developing a sense of cultural awareness, community, and appreciation for classroom diversity has become paramount in my teaching efforts and will ultimately determine where and what I choose to teach in my years in the classroom. Perhaps I will also develop confidence with other approaches that are more contextually-minded. As an elementary school teacher, the Human Relations approach fits my particular teaching methodology as well as the young children in my classroom, but it is somewhat limited in its analysis of why diversity poses so many challenges

in the first place. Why the discrimination? Why the inequality? As I continue as a student in the field of Multicultural Education, I hope to address more of these questions.

hansen:

Outstanding! Why not do a 2nd cycle next year or if you still don't have a job fill in the holes in this paper as an action research study with me next fall?

60/60	Content
20/20	↑ presentation
<hr/>	
80/80	

References

✓ Christensen, L. (2009). *Teaching for joy and justice: Re-imagining the language arts classroom*.

Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.

✓ Eidse, F., & Sichel, N. (2004). *Unrooted childhoods: Memoirs of growing up global*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

✓ Grant, C.A., & Sleeter, C. E. (2009). *Turning on learning: five approaches for multicultural teaching plans for race, class, gender, and disability* (5th ed.). New York: Wiley.

✓ Grant, C., & Sleeter, C. (2009). *Making choices about multicultural education: Five approaches to race, class and gender* (6th ed.). New York: Wiley.

✓ Koc, M. (2006). Cultural identity crisis in the age of globalization and technology. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 5, 37-43.

Huge!!

✓ McCaig, N. (1992). Birth of a notion. *The Global Nomad Quarterly*, 1, 1-2.

✓ Pollock, D. C., & Van Reken, R. E. (1999). *The third culture kid experience: Growing up among worlds*. Yarmouth, MN: Intercultural Press, Inc.

Looks to be seminal.

✓ Useem, R.H. (1976). Third culture kids. *Today's Education*, 65, 103-105.

LA Brown

Scoring Rubric - Graduate Writing Requirement, Master of Arts in Teaching

Scoring Level

Style and Format

4 - Exemplary

In addition to meeting the requirement for a "3," the paper is consistent with APA throughout. Models the language and conventions used in related scholarly/professional literature. Would meet the guidelines for an APA publication.

Mechanics

In addition to meeting the requirements for a "3," the paper is essentially error free in terms of mechanics. Writing flows smoothly from one idea to another. Transitions help establish a sound scholarly argument and aid the reader in following the writer's logic.

Content and Organization

In addition to meeting the requirements for a "3," excels in the organization and presentation of ideas related to the topic. Raises important issues or ideas which may not have been represented in the literature cited. Would serve as a good basis for further research on the topic.

3 - Accomplished

While there may be minor errors, APA conventions for style and format are used consistently throughout the paper. Demonstrates thoroughness and competence in documenting sources; the reader would have little difficulty referring back to cited sources. Style and format contribute to the comprehensibility of the paper. Models the discipline's overall journalistic style.

While there may be minor errors, the paper follows normal conventions of spelling and grammar throughout. Errors do not interfere significantly with comprehensibility. Transitions and organizational structures such as subheadings are used which help the reader move from one point to another.

Follows all requirements for the paper. Topic is timely and carefully focused. Clearly outlines the major points related to the topic; ideas are logically arranged to present a sound scholarly argument. Paper is interesting and holds the reader's attention. Does a creditable job summarizing related literature.

2 - Developing

While some APA conventions are followed, others are not. Paper lacks consistency of style and/or format. It may be unclear which references are direct quotes and which are paraphrased. Based on the information provided, the reader would have some difficulty referring back to cited sources. Significant revisions would contribute to the comprehensibility of the paper.

Frequent errors in spelling, grammar (such as subject/verb agreements and tense), sentence structure and/or other writing conventions make reading difficult and interfere with comprehensibility. Writing does not flow smoothly from point to point; lacks appropriate transitions.

While the paper represents the major requirement, it is lacking in substantial ways. The content may be poorly focused or the scholarly argument weak or poorly conceived. Major ideas related to the content may be ignored or inadequately explored. Overall, the content and organization needs significant revision to represent a critical analysis of the topic.

1 - Beginning

APA conventions are not followed. Fails to demonstrate thoroughness and competence in documentation. Lack of appropriate style and format make reading and comprehensibility problematic.

Paper contains numerous errors in spelling, grammar, and/or sentence structure that make following the logic of the paper extremely difficult.

Analysis of existing scholarly/professional literature on the topic is inadequate. Content is poorly focused and lacks organization. The reader is left with little information about or understanding of the paper's topic.