

4-Hour, Short Essay Comprehensive Examination: Example

(1) Multicultural, Social Justice Curriculum/CSTP: Planning Instruction and Designing Learning Experiences for all Students

In the article “The Global Achievement Gap” by Tony Wagner, the author states, “The global achievement gap is the gap between what we are teaching and testing in our schools, even in the ones that are most highly-regarded, versus the skills all students will need for careers, college, and citizenship in the 21st century.” In your response, address the following:

- What are needed skills for the 21st century and how are schools presently addressing these?
- Why do the students of the United States do poorly on international comparisons?
- How is our economy impacted by the success of our graduates?
- What is the role of our assessment system and student learning?
- How are you responding/will respond to this at the local level and at your school?

The topic of the global achievement gap is one that is often on my mind. As teachers, we keep hearing that our students are graduating from high school ill-prepared for both the academic demands of college and the collaborative and communicative needs of the workforce. We looked at the achievement gap in several classes, but focused on in quite a bit in CI 246, especially in Au's *Rethinking Multicultural Education*, which points out that not all students are falling behind; the gap is affecting students of color more than any other group. Regardless of race, our students as a whole are being inadequately prepared to compete globally because we are focused on the wrong things.

The skills needed for the 21st century fall into two categories: collaborative communication and emerging technologies. Students across the country are not being adequately prepared in either category, which is hurting both the college-bound and those entering the workforce right away. More and more, workers in our global society are required to collaborate in order to problem-solve, create, and invent. We have been so focused on teaching to the test that we have forgotten to teach our students how to work with each other; how to participate in meaningful inquiry; how to support each other; how to respectfully disagree; how to infer, judge, predict, and analyze. Our students are doing poorly on international comparisons because they aren't being taught how to work with each other, let alone how to work with those in foreign countries. There needs to be a bigger shift of focus to global communications starting at younger ages. Our education system is presently addressing these deficiencies with the looming implementation of Common Core and the rise of science and technology-based academies. Something needs to change; we need to move away from standardized tests and move towards more meaningful performance-based assessments, as Wayne Au and Melissa Bollow Tempel's *Pencils Down: Rethinking High-Stakes Testing and Accountability in Public Schools* text proposes.

In addition to not being prepared to collaborate globally, our students are falling behind as far as technology goes. The achievement gap starts locally, with resources not being divided equitably. Yes, there are districts like mine who are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on iPads; but for every district like mine, there are twenty who haven't updated their technology since the early '90s. Technology has shifted the divide however; now, it is the poorer schools that seem to get all of the newest technology, a move that administrators and lawmakers hope will raise test scores. Schools in middle-class neighborhoods are the ones now being left behind; these are the schools that are in desperate need of updated technology so that they may compete globally once these students are adults. This will benefit the socioeconomically disadvantaged students of color that Au argues for, but may hurt middle-class students.

Our role in assessment and student learning should be to prepare students to be good people and contributing members of society. When students graduate from our educational system, they should be able to read, write, think critically, contribute to society, collaborate with others despite differences, and have the ability to make change in the world. We have been failing at this as a whole. While a good number of our students enter college or the workforce successfully, there are far too many of our students who don't graduate high school or who do so with no real abilities. It is our job to teach meaningful content and assess in a meaningful way, which does not equate to standardized testing.

As far as my own teaching, I have always seated my students in groups of four and most of my classwork is collaborative in nature (I'm a facilitator who believes in Social theory and the Humanistic approach). Because I have such a high number of English Learners, I write speaking, listening, and collaboration into my lesson plans every day. I would rather a student participate in a collaborative activity, even if he doesn't understand it, rather than struggle through something on his own. Peers are often the best people to explain things because they speak each others' language and can find the right way to articulate something or the perfect example to give.

I use technology in my classroom, but do so only if it enhances what I am teaching. I am not a fan of taking kids to the computer lab just because it means I won't have to teach. My students recently each received their own iPad, which I use in my classroom. I had them all download apps, especially things like Google Translate and Rosetta Stone which have helped my English Learners greatly. Dictionary.com is another fantastic app that is changing the way my students interact with their vocabulary words.

(2) Multicultural, Social Justice Instruction/CSTP Engaging and Supporting All Students in Learning

Describe one of your colleagues' final presentations regarding their views on social justice and how this will impact your teaching. Specially, address the following:

- the content of the presentation;
- how the presentation addresses social justice;
- how it will impact the teaching of your students; and
- implications for teaching and learning beyond your classroom.

The presentation I am focusing on is S. M's prezi "Increasing Parent Participation for Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Families" for CI 246.

Shannon's research focuses on how to raise the level of parent participation at a school that is socioeconomically disadvantaged and that also has a high number of English Learners. Shannon has great supporting research which involves possible reasons for the disproportion of parents of participate versus those who don't. Shannon's research addresses the real reasons why parents of these students aren't more involved, most of them having to do with a lack of time and/or resources. Shannon conducted a survey for parents inquiring how they prefer to receive communication from the school and how the school could make it easier. Shannon's research yielded her results that she could work with in conjunction with her district and school site: make TB/fingerprinting more convenient so more parents could volunteer at the school, give advance notification for things like parent/teacher conferences, and just generally respect parents more.

The presentation focuses on one of the major components of Multicultural Education which is building bridges between school and home, as we learned about in Jeannie Oakes and Martin Liptons

Teaching to Change the World and Jana Noel's *Multicultural Education*. Family involvement is a major tenant of ME and is one that really defines a student's academic success. As Shannon's research shows, most of the parents do care, but they lack the time, money, and sometimes language skills that are needed to be an active member at the school site and in their child's education. A lot of parents of socioeconomically disadvantaged children work multiple jobs and often don't have a strong English language skills themselves and are unable to help with homework, especially as the child ages and work becomes more difficult. Shannon's attempts at garnering more parental support are valiant and I believe that her students' parents will hopefully see how hard she is trying to build that ME bridge to them.

I've been following Shannon's research on parental participation throughout the program because I face the same problems. I also teach in a socioeconomically disadvantaged school with a high population of English Learners. Shannon's presentation has caused me to reach out to parents more. It is difficult to make calls home to parents who don't speak English, but I am getting help from one of our school secretaries. I have also invited parents into my room after school in an open-house format to talk about their child's progress. I have found that this type of informal setting is much more desirable for many of the parents than the intimidating parent-teacher conferences. I am also sending home more written notices (in Spanish) to further keep the lines of communication open. I have had several conversations with my principal about making it easier for parents to come volunteer during the school day, so hopefully I will see an increase in that soon. I take a Humanistic approach to my teaching because I really believe that the individual child is so important. Learning needs to be fostered in all aspects of their life in order for them to have as big a chance at success as possible.

As far as implications for my classroom and beyond, I think that Shannon's research really underscored for me all of the ME concepts we have been learning about in this program, especially those discussed in CI 241 and CI 260. You can't build home and community relationships without respecting and incorporating the culture in your classroom. They all go hand in hand. Everything in ME is connected and it all leads back to the child. Increasing parent participation will help me out tremendously, but, more importantly, it will help each of my students out. Their academic success will grow exponentially if their parents have a more active role in their education.

(3) Multicultural, Social Justice Assessment/CSTP Assessing Student Learning

In the article "Pockets of Potential," the author states, "Not all children are alike; instruction should be adaptable to individual and diverse learners. There are significant opportunities for genuinely supporting differentiated, autonomous, and individualized learning through mobile devices." What implications do you see mobile learning having on social justice in the classroom and how might assessment of this new learning be equally applied to support student learning?

Throughout this program, we have read and discussed many different views, approaches, and theories. For me, one thing has remained the same: my dedication to view each of my students as an individual and to try my best to both teach and assess each student as such. The rise of mobile devices, such as iPads, has made this much easier. We talked a lot about emerging technologies in CI 246 and how they influence MSJE, and there have been differing views based on individual experiences.

The rise of mobile devices will have a huge impact on social justice. The implementation of the one-to-one program puts all of our students on the same level; there is no difference between a richer student's iPad and a socioeconomically disadvantaged student's iPad. The iPads have also made it easier for my students to do work at home. Now they have access to dictionaries, thesauruses, research, etc. right at their fingertips. My English Learners use Google Translate to help with their English and Dictionary.com to help with their vocabulary and pronunciations. The students who don't have Wi-Fi at home know where to go to get it, so that has not yet been an issue.

The biggest benefit social justice-wise that I have seen is the availability of literature in the students' home language. Our Spanish speakers are downloading Spanish language versions of titles that they always wanted to read, but were too difficult for them in English (the *Harry Potter* series, etc.). I have seen students reading books in Tagalog, too.

The greatest impact I think the mobile devices will have on social justice is the possibility of more varied types of assessments. Already with the iPads, I have offered assignment opportunities that include voice recordings, video editing with iMovie, creating a Prezi or Haiku Deck, etc. The iPad really allows students to show what they know in a way that is meaningful to them which, at the end of the day, is what I want. I want students to own their knowledge and be proud of it. The availability of the iPad allows them to get creative, collaborate, experiment, problem-solve, and invent. It has opened so many doors as far as assessment goes, and is moving towards a more child-centered approach by allowing the child to be in more control of his/her learning. The implementation of mobile devices also supports inclusion and giving Special Education students and English Learners more modifications and scaffolds to help them more easily access content.

My school was lucky enough to go one-to-one iPads about six weeks ago. It has been trial and error in the classroom (intercepting FaceTime calls, catching them playing games when they're supposed to be researching, watching them take "selfies" as if I can't see them, etc.). But for the most part, the iPads have been a huge success, especially for my English Learners and Special Education students. I am a humanist at heart, a facilitator as opposed to an executive or a liberationist. My framework is ARMKE, with my focus lying heavily on my students and my relationships with them. The iPads have made it much easier for me to differentiate for my individual students, which is something I always try to do to the best of my ability.

(4) Multicultural, Social Justice Classroom Management/CSTP Creating and Maintaining Effective Environments for Learning

Many MSJE educators call for classrooms to be "apprenticeships in democracy." You've read and watched videos with examples of classrooms that allow students to learn about democracy by actually participating in democratic practices, processes, and structure. Assuming the best way to learn about democracy is by practicing it, how do you (or could you) organize your classroom so that students have meaningful opportunities to engage in such practice?

One of the biggest components of Multicultural Social Justice Education (MSJE) is teaching students how to thrive in a democratic environment. Throughout this program, especially in CI 241 reading Carl A. Grant and Christine E. Sleeter's *Turning on Learning: Five Approaches for Multicultural Teaching Plans for Race, Class, Gender, and Disability*, we have learned about how important the student is and that he/she should have an active part of their own education. Creating a truly democratic society takes different approaches, such as social and humanistic, but also requires really good classroom management. Democracy in the classroom is something all teachers (executives, facilitators, and especially liberationists) benefit from.

I begin my class week one by infusing democratic concepts and practices into my lessons. One of my first lessons each year is creating class rules. I allow each one of my periods to first work in small groups to collaborate on appropriate class rules before we share out as a class and the students vote. Each period gets their own set of rules that they created. I have found this to be much more meaningful (and successful) than if I create rules that they then have to follow. Allowing students to participate in this process makes them feel from the beginning like they are part of the class.

I feel strongly about giving students opportunities to voice their own opinions in a democratic way. As an AVID teacher, I incorporate Philosophical Chairs and Socratic Seminars in my classroom on a regular basis. Students know that they are an integral part of the learning process. As much as I can, I give my students the ability to make their own educated decisions, but I do show them that their choices have effects. I am a consequentialist deep down, and I feel that part of the democratic process is knowing that your actions do have an effect on other people or things. Every vote counts, every word counts, every actions counts.

The democratic process is a huge part of collaboration, which is a requirement in my classroom every day. Students need to learn to work together, learn together, and respect one another in order to truly be a democracy.

(5) Organizing Subject Matter for Student Learning

Given the current emphasis on "back-to-basics" literacy and math instruction, there is little time for other academic subjects such as science and social studies. How might you go about integrating content areas through MSJE thematic units? What connections do you see among the concepts, themes, and/or standards across language arts, math, social studies, and science in your classroom and/or school?

The narrow focus of testing has really done our students a huge injustice. There is so much culture and knowledge that need to be experienced in science and social studies. Students really need exposure to all content areas, no matter how low their language or math skills are.

One way to increase the exposure to content areas is through cross-curricular units, especially those that have an MSJE theme. I am currently wrapping up my unit on Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, in which I not only incorporated science and history, I also tied our learning to MSJE themes.

We began our unit with short research projects on varying topics, all rooted in either science, history, or culture. Topics varied from genetic engineering, periods of oppression, arranged marriages, euthanasia, etc. All topics play a role in the text, so students needed to have some background on them before we began reading. For the research project, students chose their own groups (democracy and collaboration). They then used iPads (technology) to conduct research with a graphic organizer (scaffold for my ELs) after I modeled for them. As they worked, I circled the room and put out small fires. Then they presented their findings to the class, who took notes during the presentations.

Throughout our reading, we have returned to the presentation topics and viewed them through our own individual lenses. I have taught my students about different perspectives, and every day after we read, we talk about the text through our own perspectives. The students share things related to their culture, especially when we got to the parts in the book regarding ceremonies and family pastimes. They had to use the iPad to interview family members about memories over Thanksgiving break (connecting school to home) because the concept of memory is important in the text.

Next week, we will be ending our unit with a Socratic Seminar that will focus on major MSJE topics: equality for all people, democracy/making your own choices, the idea of culture and its place in the world, and rituals.

There are so many ways to connect different content areas through MSJE. The idea of equality is woven through every content area: how are characters equal in this novel? How does the property of equality work in math? What are some groups throughout history that have been disenfranchised and not treated equally? How are different strands of DNA equal? MSJE concepts can be used as a

platform in any subject and can be used to connect subjects if done thoughtfully. We have read some texts that have amazing MJSE units in them, such as Carl A. Grant and Christine E. Sleeter's *Turning on Learning: Five Approaches for Multicultural Teaching Plans for Race, Class, Gender, and Disability* and Linda Christensen's *Teaching for Joy and Justice*.

(6) Multicultural, Social Justice Action Research /CSTP Developing as a Professional Educator

Being a reflective educator has many benefits for the practitioner. How can the action research process contribute to your professional growth and longevity? Include at least three specific benefits from continued involvement in the action research process.

The action research process has been a challenging one, but one that will ultimately make me a better educator. I have grown so much as a teacher and have learned so much, not just from the texts, but from my colleagues as well.

One benefit from my involvement in the action research process is my ability to find research. I was an English major, so I always knew how to find literary resources, but this program showed me where to find professional research that can help inform my teaching. Learned about how to correctly find journals, articles, and peer-reviewed texts has been rewarding. Since beginning this program, I have found myself going to the Madden Library site several times to look up information on something I am thinking about regarding my teaching. Because of this program and my new love of research, I bought subscriptions to several English teacher journals that will further help with my professional development.

Another benefit from the action research process is actually looking at data and figuring out what it all means. Before this program, I knew how to collect information, but I didn't know how to really analyze it. My involvement in this program has helped me figure out which data is important and necessary and which stuff isn't. I have also learned that I need to have multiple measures, not just quantitative. Data is best when there are various sources and various methods involved. I'm still a novice at the whole data collection thing, but I have been doing a more thorough job looking at my students' educational data history in our online database so that I have a better idea of their strengths and weaknesses.

Lastly, a benefit I have received from my continued involvement in the action research process is that I now know how important it is to actually analyze the data and use it to inform my teaching. For instance, I was actually considering getting rid of my Reader Response Journals (students respond to their independent reading in short journal entries) until I saw the results of my project. It was like pulling teeth getting some kids to complete the journals and I wasn't sure if it was a battle I wanted to fight anymore. But then I got the feedback from students and saw the reading test results, and there was no denying it: the journals needed to stay.

Data is no good unless it's used to make meaningful changes in the classroom. I took the data I got from the research projects I did throughout this program and actually applied it to my classroom. I have already seen results, and I hope to continue to see the effects of all the research I have done over the past eighteen months. I have truly enjoyed my time in this cohort and would not be the teacher I am today without it. Thank you!