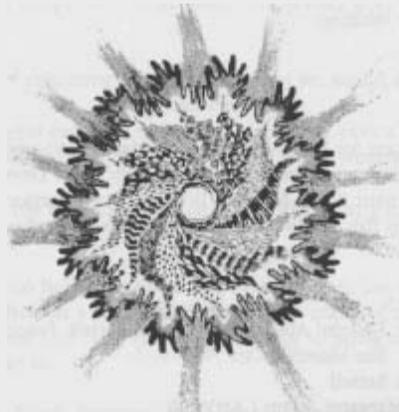


Making Connections
supplemental document



Antiracist/Culture-Based Approaches
(June 1998)



CLOW / CCPEF

Introduction

Making Connections is a feminist approach to curriculum for literacy and EAL instruction. It grew out of a recognized need for woman-positive literacy materials that reflect the realities of women's lives. However, there are many ways to make curriculum, many feminist approaches to curriculum and many ways to address social change through education. *Making Connections* presents some of these ways.

Making Connections was created through the work of the Literacy Committee of the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women and twelve literacy workers from across Canada who collaborated on writing the curriculum. Once it was completed, fifteen facilitators from across Canada were contracted to develop and facilitate workshops on using the manual. These facilitators came together face-to-face twice: first, to discuss the nature of the workshops they would give and, second (one year later), to discuss their experiences in giving the workshops.

For some facilitators, the process of conducting workshops with *Making Connections* was a struggle as gaps in cultural relevance and anti-racism emerged. The intersection of race, class and gender brought up many issues and these facilitators came back to the second meeting with a range of emotions, questions and ideas about addressing these issues.

As a result, we have reflected on the content of *Making Connections* and on the process of introducing it to literacy and EAL classrooms. We have identified some of its gaps in addressing racism and presenting culture-based approaches to learning, and have compiled a list, by no means exhaustive, of suggestions for facilitators, instructors and tutors who use *Making Connections*. We encourage you to think about these suggestions as you adapt the material for your learners. Our goal is to raise awareness about ways to apply feminist principles that are also anti-racist and culture-based.

Recognize that:

-all people have culture, not just the "other"

-affirmation, identification, challenge and exploration of culture, and cultural and racial assumptions, should be throughout the work, not "special" events or chapters

-issues such as self-esteem, violence, gender roles, etc., cross cultures; but the circumstances that give rise to those issues and the ways to address them, are culturally based (including the effect of racial assumptions and racism)

-everyone has his/her own values around topics and these values may not be shared by students (don't assume that a learner, because of his/her culture, will or will not want to talk about something)

-there is a difference between pushing the boundaries of learning for students, and imposing your own values and culture (recognize when something is *your*

pet topic and when your students have expressed interest)

-a curriculum should reflect the needs and desires of a community

-*Making Connections* is an example of possibilities; it is not a prescription

-literacy is about personal empowerment, not just reading/writing skills, and therefore curriculum should be empowering and culturally relevant

-learners will have their own preferences with respect to culture-based curriculum (eg. not all people belonging to a culture may want to use curriculum based on that culture)

-feminism can be questioned and deconstructed

-there are multiple feminisms

-feminism is racist if it reflects only the experience of white women

-the relevance of feminism in the lives of some learners may be tied to a history of racism (eg. most First Nations, pre-contact, were matrilineal; women were considered the most powerful people in the community in that they could choose or depose leaders)

-it is possible to teach or present challenging ideas or concepts even where there is resistance to terms such as "racism" or "racist"

-there is a wealth of experience and knowledge in any group of learners and there are as many ways to learn and to teach as there are learners and teachers

-it is hard to see your own biases

-there are no jagged heart symbols in *Making Connections* to indicate difficult racial issues

-students will legitimately question the expectation that they fit into the dominant culture or are subordinate to that culture

-the issue of education itself can be extremely traumatic, especially with respect to the experiences of Aboriginal people in residential schools

-learning will be inefficient where there is negative self-esteem, lack of history, lack of language or honoured identity, until these issues are addressed

-teaching/learning processes that incorporate anti-racism and culture-based approaches will take longer in development but will have better results through richer and varied activities and improved cross-cultural understanding

-we are *not* "all the same" but common experiences may provide a starting point for discussions of difference

-diverse cultural groups can work together for social and educational change

White Instructors/Facilitators Recognize that:

- in Canada your culture is dominant and the assumptions made by this culture are often invisible
- elements from other cultures (talking circle, Medicine Wheel) can be incorporated into teaching if it is done with respect
- people of colour have experiences of racial oppression which you don't share
- dealing with issues of race and one's own racism are difficult but both practitioners and learners need to overcome the fear of making mistakes, just as in any learning process

Suggestions for Strategies

- identify and acknowledge sources of information (eg. the Latin American sources of popular education)
 - use experiential rather than textbook approaches (eg. have learners participate in a sweat lodge, then write or talk about their experience, using their own words to generate a word list)
 - let students define/direct the learning experience; be willing to abandon set curriculum in order to deal with issues identified by learners
 - make space for people of diverse cultures to be hired in literacy and EAL programs
 - review *Making Connections*, adding your own symbol to identify difficult/problematic racial issues or exercises
 - let students be a guide as to what is *not* a good resource for learning
 - develop curriculum from questions and curiosities of the learner
 - validate experiences of racism and make room for them in the learning process
 - trust and respect what learners already know
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Resources

Films/Videos

Check with the National Film Board for availability of these films.

Moccasin Flats

Justice Denied

No Turning Back

For Angela Blue Eyes

Publications

A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on transforming education, by P. Friere and I. Shor, Bergin and Garvey, 1987.

A Pedagogy of the Oppressed, by Paolo Friere, New York: Seabury Press, 1968.

Anti-Racism, Feminism and Critical Approaches to Education, edited by Roxana Ng, Pat Staton and Joyce Scane, Bergin & Garvey, 1995.

“Anti-Racist Education: A career in social and political change,” by Beryl Tsang, *Wedf*, vol.9 no.3, Spring 1992, p.25.

Anti-Racist Education and the Adult Learner: A handbook for educators in Adult and Continuing Education programs, Toronto Board of Education, 1991.

“Beyond the ‘Culturally Sensitive’: Violence prevention by Education Wife Assault,” by Nupur Gogia, *Wedf*, vol.10 no.1, Winter 1992/93, p.22.

Bridges of Power: Women’s multicultural alliances, by Lisa Albrecht and Rose Brewer, Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990.

Building the Fire, edited by Katherine Gullion, Lakeland College, Vermillion, AB.

Choose to Change (stories by inmates at Brandon Correctional Institution), Literacy Partners of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB (literacy@magic.mb.ca).

Chi Ki Ken Da Mun / So You Should Know, edited by Linda North and Barb St. Goddard, Literacy Partners of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB (literacy@magic.mb.ca).

“Educating Across Difference: Sistren theatre collective,” by Chantal Phillips, *Wedf*, vol.9 no.3, Spring 1992, p.38.

Educating for change Arnold, et. al. Toronto: Doris Marshall Institute, 1996.

“For White Anti-Racists: Avoiding the detours in the journey toward justice,” by jona olsson, *Wedf*, vol.12 no.4, Winter 1996/97, p.16.

40 Ways to Raise a Nonracist Child, by Mary Ann French and Barbara Mathias, Harper Perennial, 1996.

“Lady Bountiful: The white woman teacher in multicultural education,” by S. Cavanagh and H. Harper, *Wedf*, vol.11 no.2, Fall 1994, p.27.

Ningwakwe Clearinghouse for Native Literacy Curriculum

Teaching to Transgress: Education as the practice of freedom, by bell hooks, New York: Routledge, 1994.

“The Race to Innocence: Confronting hierarchal relations among women,” by Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack, *The Journal of Gender, Race and Justice*, vol.1, 1998.

The Traveling Book, produced by Learners of the North, Literacy Partners of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB (literacy@magic.mb.ca).

“What We Want,” by Claudette Dumont-Smith, *Wedf*, vol10 no.1, Winter 1992/93, p.8.
