Educational foundations in Trinidad and Tobago: Reformulating a Masters course and building a learning community

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The context of this study is a Masters course in educational foundations, adjusted from an overall theoretical format to one which places heavy emphasis on the social interaction of participants toward the building of a community of learning. In a learning community, situations arise which require of its members social competencies conducive to positive social interaction. Subsequent to the course re-format, a qualitative case study was undertaken to gather responses over two course offerings. Data were analysed from teacher-participants, lecturers and tutors, as well as from sections of an assignment. Teacher experiences reveal that success in building a learning community needs scaffolding through in-depth sensitization into what a learning community entails. The challenge to lecturers is to examine their commitment to an emphasis on community building rather than discrete disciplinary knowledge in the philosophy, psychology and sociology of education.

Keywords: social competencies; learning community; community building; participant experience.

INTRODUCTION

This research probed lecturers, tutors and students (teacher-participants) for their experiences of the Masters in Education (M. Ed) foundations course "Education and the Development of Social Competencies" under a new 2011 format geared to building a learning community. The course took place at a university in Trinidad and Tobago at its School of Education. The teacher-participants (enrolment of about 120 per year) were predominantly teachers and administrators in early childhood, primary and secondary schools.

Social competencies refer to capabilities (knowledge, skills, and attitudes/dispositions) that persons should possess in order to engage self and others in a positive manner. They resemble life-skills of the Health and Family Life Education Curriculum that "constitute

a platform for living in the Trinidad and Tobago society" (Trinidad and Tobago, Curriculum Planning and Development Division, 2009a, p. 12). As such, the course builds problem-solving capacity in relation to "critical dilemmas, conflicts and prominent controversies arising from social development" (The UWI, St. Augustine Campus, Faculty of Humanities and Education, Regulations and Syllabuses, 2012- 2013, p. 87). In the school setting, social competencies include effective communication skills, self-knowledge and a student-friendly disposition aligned with "essential learning outcomes" such as citizenship and personal development (Trinidad and Tobago, Curriculum Planning and Development Division, 2009b, p. 3). Given definitional variations among researchers, Rose-Krasnor (1997) considers as key: "effectiveness in interaction" (p. 119) with "flexibility" as appropriate to context (p. 129). Thus social competencies in teaching such as "willingness to cooperate" and "organizational ability" (Kanning, Böttcher & Herrmann, 2012, p. 146) have as their goal effective social interaction.

Dissatisfaction expressed by the teacher-participants who had experienced the course prompted us (lecturers on the course) to reformulate the course structure. We noted an enduring individualism on the part of teacher-participants and a persistent preference for an "academic" offering over one exploring "lived experiences" and affective capabilities. In rethinking the course, we maintained the content but placed more emphasis on practice, including unsupervised practice (Mitra, 2013), and we also altered the course assessment.

Following are quotes from a 2010 (Mohammed, 2011) evaluation of the course as it was originally formatted.

> Different lecturers had different expectations and it felt like three separate courses at times.

> The core content of the course is . . . very valuable to those in the teaching profession. However the presentation of the course was inconsistent.

> We are still a very exam and results-oriented society and students just want whatever info they need to pass the course.

The course content, therefore, was largely uncontested, but the comments called for improvements in approach.

In its original structure, the course included one overview and nine topic-specific lectures, tutorials, a wrap-up session and a final tutorial. Each of the three foundations disciplines––philosophy, psychology and sociology—had three lectures of one-and-a-half hour duration followed by a one-and-a-half hour break-out tutorial session. Assessments included a course-work assignment as an integrated essay (40%) and a final examination (60%). The separate elements of the course were linked by way of common themes (diversity, reducing prejudice and educational reform) as shown in Table 1.

On re-modelling, we maintained the overview lecture and the wrap-up session and final tutorial; however, instead of the nine lectures, we provided only three one-hour lectures––one for each discipline—followed by two-hour break-out tutorials and scheduled supervised and unsupervised tutorials. We based the tasks and activities on the course themes. Thus, the major innovations were two unsupervised tutorials, three online sessions, and enhanced group work.

Table 1 –Disciplinary Content of the Foundations Course

Foundation disciplines	Diversity	Reducing prejudice	Educational reform
Philosophy	Human cruelty Human rights	Democracy	Justification of schooling
Psychology	Traditional vs. reformed curriculum	Learning	Authentic assessment
Sociology	Postmodernism: Globalization vs. Nativism	Social-justice Prejudice	A curriculum for peace

The course assessment was set as: a group dramatic presentation, journals that reflect on various course activities, a written group assignment geared to the formulation of a plan for solving a given social problem (60%) and an examination (40%). The dramatic presentation as authentic assessment highlighted social competencies in real life scenarios (Wiggins, 1990).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before delving into the main substance of the literature review, it is useful to consider how previous research influences the design of the course. In summary, given our post-colonial context in Trinidad and Tobago, the course adjustments embodied a transformatory/emancipatory, student-centred, competence-based approach to teaching geared to community-building. The ideas guiding our course re-design along with the wider theoretical backdrop provided by the literature review represent the main elements of the conceptual framework of this research.

Education in the 21st Century is evidenced by a shift in focus from the trainer and syllabus content to the student. In the student-centred approach, students are not passive information receptors (Feldman, 2000) but are engaged with the content and with their peers, thus becoming agents of their own development. This approach contrasts with the traditional approach followed in the post-colonial Trinidad and Tobago context, in which individualism, educational certification and competition at examinations are prized (Lochan, 2011) and top-down education administration and delivery modes of teaching abound (Bristol, 2012).

To transform such a "problematic social landscape", Hickling-Hudson (2004) recommends greater "collectivity and equity" (p. 293) to reverse systemic defects and to improve "the range of skills, competencies, values and other attributes" (p. 296). In this vein, post-revolutionary Cuba has achieved remarkable success in education, becoming a leading light to its Caribbean neighbours who share a past of colonial domination. Such progress for Cuba involved consistent governmental commitment embodied in policy and widespread citizen participation (Sabina, 2009).

Fostering social competencies and building social competencies in the Trinidad and Tobago context appears to us to be an ethical imperative and is inspired by a view of transformatory education toward liberation (Shor & Freire, 1987). The shift in outlook required in transformatory learning (Mezirow, 1998), though facilitated by involvement

in a learning community, does not come easily because prior socialization in an oppressive colonial planation ethos is deeply ingrained (Brathwaite, 1973).

According to Hesse and Manson (2005), "Learning communities are built on the premise that learning is a social endeavour and that quality learning is enhanced by quality relationships" (p. 32). The learning community involves faculty and students in the social construction of knowledge (Rinehart, 1999), small group discussion and collective activity (Leibold, Probst, & Gibbert, 2002). Our course structure, therefore, incorporated activities to facilitate greater interaction among participants and the integration of educational foundations insights (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990). We also expanded group work to include in-class and out-of-class project-based learning.

Such insights into social learning have roots in the early work of Lave (1988) and Lave and Wenger (1991) who coined the term *community of practice.* Communities of practice are "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger, 2006, p. 1). Wenger stipulates three features of participants in communities of practice: seeking solutions, sharing knowledge and expression of a common vision (Meeker, 2009). Brown and Duguid (2000) emphasize the role that stories, situations, problems, and examples of successes and failures can play in helping persons bond with one another. Interaction for bonding and learning in an interactive manner, as a hallmark of a learning community, are embodied in our course. The course is structured in such a way as to offer teacher-participants the opportunity to learn informally from their peers, who teach at different types of schools, and to collaborate in small groups for task completion in a "transformative pedagogy" (Snowden, 2004).

The idea of building community through conflict resolution, collaboration, problem solving and arriving at consensus (Eichler, 2007) is applicable in a university context (Salas Velasco, 2014), though challenges accompany the shift from the lecture as the dominant approach to teaching to activities geared toward competence-based group learning, particularly in transitioning from set university procedures geared to individualized assessment focused on content. Change also "demands more resources, smaller groups, more instructors [and] is indeed less cost-effective" (Salas Velasco, 2014, p. 521). At present, there is a scenario of cost-cutting measures in our university, which is influencing the hiring of tutors and lecturers. So, apart from the change in approach to teaching and learning, economic pressures result in workload changes which circumscribe progressive adjustments, such as reducing the student-to-tutor ratio. Overcoming such obstacles in university settings does, however, "play a key role in competence development" (Salas Velasco, 2014, p. 503).

Group work, such as the pooling of information and resources among members of a group to respond to a given task (Edmunds & Brown, 2010), has positive benefits because students can gain new understanding by challenging and defending ideas, developing leadership, team-work and strengthening communication skills in a supportive learning environment (Florez & McCaslin, 2008).

Group work is not without its pitfalls and can occasion disagreement, disorganization, lack of commitment (Pauli, Mohiyeddini, Bray, Michie, & Street, 2008) and participation. Interaction can be time consuming, drift onto off-task conversation and not progress beyond "cooperation" to "collaboration". Cooperation as "a protocol that allows you not

to get in each other's way" (Nelson, 2008) is still not a sufficient condition for the *collaboration* that is intrinsic to effective group dynamics: "[C]ooperation can be achieved if all participants do their assigned parts separately . . . collaboration by contrast implies direct interaction among individuals . . . and involves negotiations, discussions and accommodating others' perspectives" (Kozar, 2010, p. 17). The degree of social engagement marking the operations of the two processes renders collaboration as more relevant to the development of social competencies.

To encourage collaboration, our course opens with a segment on group-dynamics in the quest for "the amplification you get by connecting up a bunch of human beings who . . . communicate on multiple different levels, verbally, in writing, in feeling, in acting, in pictures" (Nelson, 2008).

Assessing social competencies requires multiple and varied methods in addition to the classroom exam: "Measures of simulated performance . . . such as role-plays . . . can assess areas of knowledge, values, and skills. Within a given context, multiple items or observations are preferable" (Drisco, 2014, pp. 419, 420). In our course, we use multiple forms of assessment. The keeping of journals (both individual journals and a group journal) develops reflexive skills. The first two assignments (the dramatic presentation and the formulation of a plan for solving a given social problem), based on real life issues, are group assignments requiring planning, brain-storming, consensus building and the integration of theory and practice.

While observation and critique of teacher-participants in their real life settings would be ideal (Drisco, 2014, p. 423), time constraints determine that we opt for simulated scenarios and projects (evaluated by both tutors and by teacher-participant peers). The identification and assessment of social competencies are facilitated by way of rubrics. Table 2 is a section of the rubric which requires students to formulate a plan for reducing bullying:

Table 2: Rubric for assessment of plan to reduce bullying

Item	15-11 marks	10-6 marks	5-0 marks
(d)(i)) Formulate a plan or programme which may effectively reduce bullying and prejudice at the level of the classroom or school.	The plan is clearly formulated in terms of its aims & objectives, the scope of the project, and the intervention.	The plan is clearly formulated but is inadequate in relation to one of the following: its aims & objectives, the scope of the project; and the intervention.	The plan is not so clearly formulated and is inadequate in relation to more than one of the following: its aims & objectives, the scope of the project; and the intervention.

The rubric numerically rewards higher level cognitive and affective learning outcomes (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964). A possible self-critique lies in our neglecting to prioritize the competencies themselves and reward with regard to "effective social interaction." We are also considering isolating basic social competencies as in virtue theory, in which fundamental cardinal virtues are identified (courage, temperance, prudence, and justice) and considered as the basis for living a virtuous life. Borrowing from the virtue approach can provide an important supplement to an ethical approach that focusses on right action whether in terms of duty or utility (Rachels, 1998).

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative case study exploring perceptions arising from experiences of a bounded group of people. In a qualitative enquiry, meaning-making is explicitly targeted; meanings are mediated "through language and action", which are assessed (Dey, 1993, p. 11). Understanding the meanings participants attribute to their experiences is a prime pursuit (Dunn, 2010).

This research approach is especially relevant to lecturers, tutors and students of this course who have been socialized in a post-colonial context with associated ways of conceptualizing learning. The transformative shift which incorporates learning in community and utilizing small groups is attended by tensions, conflicts and ambiguities that can most appropriately be captured and interpreted using qualitative methods.

Understanding the prior socialized views which people bring into the learning environment is critical when introducing new learnings and activities. By soliciting the perceptions of participants, we obtained data for revealing the meaning-making processes of learners involved in the remade course with its new structure of group activities and varied formats of assignments.

The research question is: What were the perceptions of students and lecturers arising out of their experiences at building community traced over the years 2011 and 2012 in reference to the course: Education and the Development of Social Competencies?

Data collection

The sample comprised three lecturers, three tutors and students (teacher-participants) of the course (the entire cohort in 2011 and 2012 numbered 240 students). We employed a variety of data gathering methods:

- Open-ended, written reflections on the course by lecturers and tutors about their experiences of the change in approach (six staff reflections).
- An e-mail questionnaire (see Table 3) sent to students seeking open-ended reflections on various aspects of the course (16 responses out of 240 students).

Table 3: Student questionnaire

(a)	Given your experience of the course, what would you say were some of the aims/ intentions of your lecturers?
(b)	In your estimation, were these aims realized? If so, give some details. If not, or only partly so, what were the possible factors or circumstances responsible?
(c)	What did you like about the course? What did you dislike?
(d)	Do you see this course impacting on you as an individual and/or as a teacher? If not, why not? If so, how?
(e)	How best do you think this course could have been organized and delivered, given that it is only 12 weeks long (one semester)?

- Peer evaluations (Table 4) by e-mail. Students were asked to individually grade their colleagues (58 students were randomly selected from the 2011 student cohort and 50 from the 2012 cohort – a total of 108 peer evaluations).

Table 4 – Peer evaluation

Peer Evaluation

Name:			
Rate on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest)			
Member name (including yourself)	Participated in discussions	Contributed to group presentation 1	Contributed to group paper

- Group evaluations (Table 5) by e-mail. Individual students recorded their experiences—using narratives—of having worked with fellow group members during the course (50 students were randomly selected from each of the 2011 and 2012 cohorts for analysis; a total of 100).

Table 5 – Group evaluation

Group Evaluation
Write a short paragraph assessing the process of your group: What were the challenges? What were the joys? What did you learn about your group members? What did you learn about yourself?

- Part of the 2012 assignment required students to reflect as a group and to submit a written response about their experiences of having worked together (13 group reports).

Data analysis

Data gathered were in the form of written documents, submitted by the students and the lecturers/tutors. We employed constant comparison (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) procedures to analyse the data. We used open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to organize the data into themes with codes and corresponding extracts (see Table 6).

We achieved the trustworthiness criteria in the following ways: the lecturers and tutors were involved with this course for many years and have been reflecting on the issues; the teacher-participants responded in a variety of formats and had adequate time to think about their submissions; and all researchers met periodically to discuss the analysis trends and to give critical feedback, thus enriching the research product through different perspectives.

Table 6: Data coding/reduction-excerpt from the analysis of "Group evaluation"

Codes/themes	#	Statements
Difficulties/challenges with group-work		
a. Logistics of meeting	50	*The main challenge was the synchronizing of time and deadlines of 7 professionals who work full-time.*

b.	Members who lack communication skills, did not participate, who were authoritarian	5	*Slackers, free loaders, bullies.*
c.	The 2nd Assignment uncovered challenges – some did not work, some only focused on their parts	15	*'the workload was on the devotees'; 'some persons felt the end of the assigned task meant the end of the assignment'*
General experience of being in the group			
a.	Joy, fun, laughter, camaraderie	21	*'a class to remember'*
b.	Collaboration	11	*A good feeling when all co-operated to accomplish tasks*
c.	Assignment 1: everybody fell easily into the tasks; all-round participation and enjoyment	21	*The first assignment was wonderful and everybody contributed unreservedly.*

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Lecturers' perspectives: "Change is good but uncomfortable"

Lecturers and tutors were unanimous in approving the new practical course approach. They observed that students were more actively engaged than in the past, enjoying the shift in focus to "doing," which embodied the very concepts and knowledge that the course was designed to transmit. Lecturers perceived that expanding the small group activity was a definite strength.

While many students responded well, the extent to which they related their new knowledge and their emotional reactions to the course intent was not always clear because few student-reflections exhibited explicit connections. Moreover, the reduction in plenary lectures and increase in tutorials and group work did not seem to augur well for developing a sound theoretical base of the three important sub-disciplines of education (philosophy, sociology and psychology). The demands that group work made on individuals to accomplish assigned tasks seemed to be so all-absorbing that the larger context of course content and the idea that they were being confronted with situations as opportunities to develop their own social competencies faded into the background. Lecturers shared their views:

> Whilst the students say that the course is enjoyable, particularly the dramatic production . . . they should be more confident about the nature of *social competencies*.

> Working in groups . . . is both enjoyable and stressful, so that the process of group interactions becomes the dominant "task" . . . the rigors of the group process might be too distracting . . . details about content and disciplinary perspectives do not take center-stage.

So, there is the uncomfortable feeling that, whilst this approach fosters deeper engagement on the part of students, it is not as efficient as the previous approach in ensuring that they are exposed to a range of concepts, knowledge and research in the three disciplines.

This issue of content has implications for the disciplinarity/interdisciplinarity divide. Lecturers acknowledged that there were now three disciplinary lectures, yet the tasks, interactions, assignments, and a major examination question called for interdisciplinary connections. Further, some students were unable to discern whether they were delving into psychology, philosophy or sociology. These results reveal the need to transition the course further along the lines of interdisciplinarity; this is likely to cause discomfort to lecturers who are not trained in interdisciplinarity but are subject specialists.

Students' perspectives: "It was a bitter sweet experience"

There was overlap in the way teacher-participants responded to the e-mail questionnaire, the group evaluation and the 2012 assignment. The following interwoven narrative uses swimming as a metaphor for their curriculum experiences.

Students, accustomed to the traditional paradigm, even with modifications to enable interactions and technologies to provide stimulus and variety in learning, found the "idea" of change welcome. At the same time, the prospect of continuous group-work was daunting. Thrown in at the deep end, they protested:

> [T]o interact with new people of different ages and genders and backgrounds . . . stressed me out because I . . . wanted to be with my friends . . . Let people choose their own groups and the quality of work may improve!

We perceive that students cringe at the thought of having to build community—akin to how swim-novices feel when they are required to "jump in". This suggests that lecturers need to be more sensitive to this "fear of water" and provide minimally challenging pre-activities to begin to diminish the "us versus them" syndrome.

Initially, there were many positive stories as some persons found themselves "swimming" through their own natural abilities and were fortunate to be in a supportive group:

> [D]rama was not my strength. But the group pulled me along . . . the group emanated a positive attitude of which all members were able to feed and resuscitate themselves.

This positive experience could have been facilitated by a willing and adventurous deposition among members in spite of the novel course character.

The long haul, however, proved challenging. After a few "laps of the pool," it became clear that there were difficulties:

> [T]he workload was on the devotees; the saying "a promise is a comfort to a fool" proved applicable as a few members still showed little commitment . . . "just breathe" and things will work out.

For the most part they did not relay these issues to the tutors but preferred to work on them themselves, showing a willingness to commit to extra practice so that the group could compete with a high level of mastery. We see here the beginnings of a communal ethos—though in a delicate state of becoming. The skill-set that seemed to need the most work was in the affective domain; as one participant opined: "I had more patience than I sometimes give myself credit for; I quarrelled with no one, which shocked me."

There were instances when students wanted to send out a call for help but did not:

> This particular experience raised some questions that I'm not sure I have the answers to: How do you know when someone is actually giving of their best? What do you do if their best just isn't cutting it—do you give them a *bligh* [excuse them] and let it slide, or do you take the hardline? A part of me says: "Keep the focus on the bottom line. If the requirement is not being met . . . tough. Give them the axe"! . . . However there is another part of my psyche . . . that says I'm supposed to be a bit more understanding and accommodating.

These reflections show that a point is reached at which members need to find their second wind, perhaps by seeking outside help to resolve issues and tutors should be mindful of this.

Groups reported various levels of success. A few began well and, though they may have encountered some difficulties, were able to stay the course. For many, however, the prospect of drowning appeared imminent:

> I really did not see . . . the social competencies . . . coming out. I saw group bullies in two forms the "egotistic" and the very "laidback". I have seen the usefulness of social competencies in its absence.

> I hate it when people do not step up and do what they are supposed to do.

> Some of the members of my group were simply looking for the easy way out. Although they did not want to do the work, they somehow miraculously expect to get good marks. I was never a fan of group work and this has not changed.

> I was disappointed with the group. The leader did not consider the opinions of others. Two members became obnoxious and overbearing.

Even amidst such disappointment, largely directed at other members, there were comments such as:

> A class to remember.

> A good feeling when all co-operated to accomplish tasks.

> We shared a symbiotic relationship which in itself produced a synergistic relationship.

> The first assignment was wonderful and everybody contributed unreservedly.

> We had to be as diplomatic as possible in trying to have things not come to a head.

> When the time comes it is right to back down and leave things alone for the sake of achieving an aim.

> We practiced democracy so each person had an equal voice in all decisions.

> We innovatively had cyber meetings and so were able to get tasks done; and, I made new friends.

These utterances from members of the group above were apt indications of intended course outcomes. An encouraging sign was the collaboration using face-to-face and by way of available technology.

One interesting finding by way of the "Peer assessment" pertained to the social competency of self-reflection, in that students needed to become more aware of their own limitations. One lecturer commented:

> In the few cases where several members of a group seemed to identify a loafer in the group, the loafer did not score themselves any lower than any other members. What does this say for self-discovery, being true to self and developing the social competency of honesty and taking responsibility for your actions?

In this case the loafer did not recognize him/herself as shirking responsibility.

Emerging from the above accounts, the possibility exists that even amongst accomplished swimmers some may not be as competent in the butterfly or the breaststroke; our students were showing us that they did possess some level of capability, proficiency and skill in working with others, but they were not trained in the complex art of building community. Discomfort rose when they felt a sense of being adrift in not knowing how to respond to certain situations.

DISCUSSION

Given the post-colonial context of Trinidad and Tobago, with its mixture of democratic ideals and dehumanizing retentions from its colonial past, we felt it was timely to sound out participants as to their experiences in the context of a course which we consider to be transformatory and emancipatory. Findings indicate a story of both openness to change and significant resistance, with lessons for enhancing learning experiences for future cohorts.

One dilemma did emerge: how to build community, deepen the experience of working in groups and, at the same time, ensure that students are sufficiently exposed to the major concepts and knowledge in each of the foundation disciplines? The latter was a strength of the original format but, in the new format, only the most motivated students read and assessed the notes and references that were available on the online learning platform and were able to respond to questions. Our students are full-time teachers who have other courses to master per semester so the pressure of work and course demands may be a factor affecting the quality of effort given to unsupervised activities.

While some teacher-participants appreciated the online sessions (these reduce the need to commute to campus) and working in groups (with and without the tutor), they found it difficult to see the blended learning course on par with other courses:

> This course . . . was not challenging enough for students at the Masters level . . . seemed to be revisiting things I learnt as a child such as respect and tolerance . . . students used to make jokes about this course saying it was a "make up course" because of the lack of content.

The issue turns on content and what students are accustomed to, hence their unconscious biases seem to favour plenary lectures with a heavy dose of abstract knowledge. The unconventional teaching and learning arrangements in this course coupled with a strong focus on affective issues have had the unfortunate result of some students not taking it seriously. Such an attitude may be a feature of our deeply ingrained post-colonial mind-

set, so planners of the course need to recognize that we are engaged in a re-socialization process with the added dimensions that such entails.

Socialization does not only affect teacher-participants but also lecturers, as evidenced by the "territorial" concern that each discipline was not being adequately taught; back to the notion of disparate disciplines with strong boundaries. The focus on building community is sufficiently different from previous experiences of teaching educational foundations, posing a challenge to lecturers involved as to interdisciplinarity. While that again brings up the issue of having sufficient scope to expose students to a wide array of disciplinary concepts, this has to be balanced against the strengths of an interdisciplinary curriculum which requires that subject specialists encounter others from different disciplines in the guise of a learning community.

It also occurred to us that the attempts by lecturers in one course at a School of Education designed "to build community" amongst students may not be as successful as it can be because the traditional teacher-centred paradigm exists in all other courses. Even though other courses may employ periodic group-work, highly interactive sessions, integrating technology with instruction and many different forms of formative and authentic assessment (Petrina, 2007), students are rarely required to rely on others for their knowledge and experience to complete tasks. Perhaps embracing student-centeredness may well only be taken seriously when embodied as policy and implemented at the levels of the learning organization and not in a piecemeal fashion.

Even without a "whole-school as learning community" approach, students are, nevertheless, provided with the opportunity for deep reflection throughout the course. Some individuals commented on the anti-discriminatory people-skills that the course intended for them to learn:

> Having been a teacher for 21 years I have realized that having these important competencies helps build meaningful relationships with colleagues, parents and students that can have lifelong positive consequences . . . it paves the way for peace within families, communities and society as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Both lecturers and students were strained by the demands of building community because the traditional teacher-centred paradigm haunts present perspectives. With this in mind, one innovation we can introduce is a more in-depth sensitization to the goals and challenges of building community in a post-colonial society, integrated with explicit attention to the nature and role of social competencies. Success with this venture will be influenced by the larger context and, thus, advocacy could be undertaken toward refashioning the School of Education more along the lines of a learning community. At the very least, the foundations lecturers recognize that the call to interdiscipinarity is a crucial one for which our course provides an immediate platform.

Our research also clarified the need to explore what re-socialization would mean for greater success in transforming present praxis for the purposes of building community. This brings us to the question of whether one semester is enough. The stages of community formation (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001) occurring in quickened sequence may inevitably result in weak commitment to the group as the focus

of learning. In this respect Guldberg and Pilkington (2006) encourage concerted attention to the design and quality of mentoring.

Finally, matters of tightening assessment continue to be a work in progress. Explicit competencies, such as respect for diversity and the skill of advocacy, are already targeted course outcomes, yet it is difficult in every case to predict the actual shape of every social competency in a concrete fashion because social competencies are entities situated in context, with flexibility an essential characteristic (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Nevertheless, to be further explored—especially given present time and financial constraints—is a rationale for prioritizing social competencies for teachers with an accompanying rubric so that concerted attention can be given to selecting, from among the pearls, those of greater price.

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