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Natalie Gang

Buffalo State University, gangn01@buffalostate.edu

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BUFFALO STATE
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Benefits of Fostering a Multicultural Classroom Community

Natalie E. Gang, English Education (7-12), PTC • Dr. Kerry Renzoni, Music Department Chair

Abstract

Through Buffalo State University's IPDS (International Professional Development Schools), I gained experience student teaching at the International School of Siena for 8 weeks in Siena, Italy.

This study explored if and how multiple cultures and student backgrounds are integrated into the classroom and the benefits of doing so.

Examining how that is done at the International School of Siena, a school with students from various countries, can demonstrate the positive impact of fostering a multicultural classroom community. The results of this research would be beneficial to schools in the United States, as culturally responsive teaching can enhance the learning experience of both the student and teacher.



Inspiration

Throughout my time in the English Education program at Buffalo State University, I have had many opportunities to observe and teach in various public schools across Western New York. Additionally, I previously taught internationally before IPDS Siena, having taught English for one year in South Korea. All of these experiences have inspired me to look further into our classroom practices and how embracing our students' cultural backgrounds can lead to more meaningful learning. According to Buzzai (2023), "As the school context becomes increasingly heterogeneous and multicultural, teachers' self-efficacy for inclusive practices is a research area on which more attention needs to be paid."

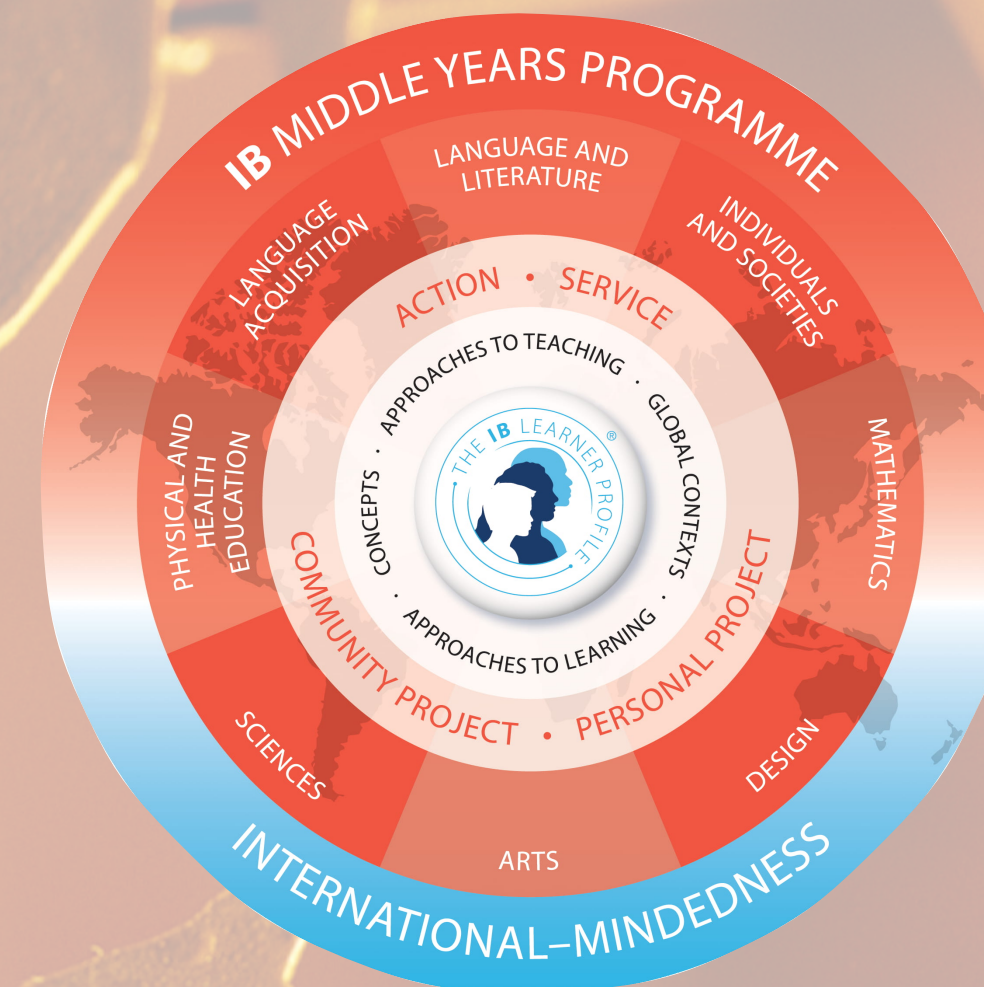
Method

The methods used to collect data included writing my own blog posts and reflecting on other participant's blog posts. Additionally, I took field observation notes within the school to understand how multiple cultures are represented in the classroom and reflected in the curriculum.

I also conducted formal interviews with teaching faculty at the International School of Siena to discuss their teaching pedagogy in relation to multicultural education and how the backgrounds of the students shape their classroom and school.

Findings

In my first interview with the principal of the International School of Siena, Ms. Jennifer Tickle, we discussed the many ways the school aims to engage in culturally responsive teaching within the International Baccalaureate framework. My second interview was with Ms. Fiona King (my Grade 7 Language & Literature mentor), and both interviewees agreed that the IB framework supports culturally responsive learning practices. However, Ms. Tickle explained that "it doesn't just happen" and is instead something "all IB schools need to be very aware of as they're doing their planning".



Discussion

Childs (2017) stated that, "It is valuable for the students to bring their experiences into the classroom, but educators should also introduce new cultural experiences and ideas from outside of the learning environment." During my placement, I consistently noticed many teachers bringing in new cultural experiences and ideas.

Furthermore, Ms. King noted that "Materials are to be from international sources, for example, literary texts from a variety of authors and cultural backgrounds.", which would apply directly to our Language & Literature classes. According to Farmer (2019), "all students can benefit from contact with peers who are different in various ways." At the International School of Siena, all students are mixed together and exposed to each other. I saw the positive impact of this in my Grade 6 classroom, as students were able to converse in a few different languages and expressed interest in their peer's cultural backgrounds. After analyzing my data, I found that purposeful planning and teacher commitment to the diversity of learning materials enhanced the learning experience in a multicultural classroom. Moreover, it encouraged international-mindedness and supported the sense of community that exists throughout the whole school.

Conclusions

Being able to teach and observe in an international school with such a diverse faculty and student body allowed me to reflect on my own culturally responsive teaching practices daily. Additionally, witnessing the way students communicated with each other was a testament to their evolving understanding of the world around them. For educators, taking care to create a classroom community among your diverse learners will lead to them becoming more informed of other cultures and and empathetic toward the experiences of others.

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