

Teaching in the Global Society: Exploring an Educational Program in an International Setting from the Perspective of Graduate Students

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1. Abstract

A recent trend in higher education is the internationalization of university programs. This paper examines the experiences of postsecondary graduate students enrolled in literacy education courses in Barbados. The courses were based on a constructivist pedagogical approach to learning and the instructors were interested in the transferability of graduate education course work when teachers come from, and teach in, a different culture and context. The researchers developed a qualitative study to examine graduate teachers' perceptions of the courses to determine which aspects were most instrumental in contributing to learner engagement and to resulting changes in their teaching practices. The findings provide valuable insights into graduate students' conceptualizations of their educational experiences and also support the benefits of a constructivist approach in the teaching and learning process.

Key Words:

classroom practices, qualitative inquiry, constructivism, literacy education, student reflections, international

2. Introduction

One of the recent trends in teacher education is the internationalization of teacher education programs (Crabtree & Sapp, 2004). As developing countries look to compete in the global community, literacy is recognized as a key factor in social and economic success. As part of this internationalization process, Mount Saint Vincent University (Halifax, Nova Scotia) has offered Bachelor of Education and Master of Education programs in Jamaica and Barbados, with members of the Faculty of Education providing a Masters of Education program in Supporting Learners with Diverse Needs and Exceptionalities in partnership with Erdiston College (Bridgetown, Barbados) from 2005 to 2007. This program was initiated in response to the Barbados 1995 White Paper on Education Reform, *Each One Matters—Quality Education for All*. With universal access to basic education in place, the country turned its attention toward reform of the education system to stay current with educational, economic, and technological change. In Barbados, education is highly valued, and their schools have many notable graduates who have received world-wide academic recognition. This Master of Education program was part of the new initiative intended to promote high quality, inclusive education and to prepare students for a technological, global society (Barbados Minister of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, 2001).

One question that arises from this trend in the internationalization of teacher education programs is the transferability of effective graduate teacher coursework when teachers come from, and teach in, a different culture and context. As instructors in this

Master of Education program in Barbados, responsible for developing and teaching literacy education courses for both elementary and secondary teachers in an intensive Summer Institute, we began our course preparation by engaging in dialogue about our own philosophies on teaching and learning. As we explored our beliefs about literacy education, and considered what would be important to include in our courses, we asked questions such as the following: Are current research-based practices in literacy instruction and assessment in Western culture transferable to education in other countries with different educational structures and resources? What role does the local culture play in schools in Barbados? How do we integrate this culture into our teaching?

3. Views of Literacy Learning

Through our discussions of course content, we articulated several key components of effective classroom practice in literacy instruction. Central to our beliefs about literacy learning is the importance of viewing reading as a meaning making process, that is, “reading is a process of interpretation and negotiation from the view point of our own lives” (Booth, Green, & Booth, 2004, p. 100). Within this framework, literacy instruction focuses on teaching a repertoire of strategies such as activating prior knowledge, setting a purpose for reading, making connections to the text, questioning the text, monitoring comprehension, and making inferences (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Tovani, 2000).

Oral language as the foundation of literacy learning and the bridge that connects learning across the curriculum was also central to our discussions (Healy, 2006; Westby, 1991). We strongly believe that “Children’s comprehension of text and topics, as well as their repertoire of strategies, grow as a result of conversations about texts” (Hiebert, Pearson, Taylor, Richardson, & Paris, 1998, p. 4) and we wanted to focus on the role of oral language in the coursework, in part, by modelling the importance of purposeful talk as a tool for learning through partner, small group, and whole class discussions. This topic also led to consideration of how we could provide opportunities for teachers to integrate students’ home language experiences and local culture into their teaching practices to support literacy learning.

Integral to our view of literacy learning is the recognition of the reciprocity between reading and writing as “Learning to write assists children in their reading; in learning to read, children also gain insights that help them as writers.” (Hiebert et al., 1998, p. 5). Teachers’ understanding of this reading/writing connection fosters programming that enhances students’ literacy learning. We also discussed the role of literacy learning as a transdisciplinary process. Understanding how to read, write, view, and represent one’s knowledge in various subjects requires students to learn how to be literate in and across different curriculum areas. We believe that teachers of all subjects need to accept the responsibility to teach students how to be literate in their particular content/curriculum area. As well, literacy instruction was to be embedded in a framework that focused on student choice, explicit instruction through mini-lessons, and opportunities for authentic learning experiences. Another key component was the Gradual Release of Responsibility model (Duke & Pearson, 2002) with its focus on specific strategy instruction, scaffolding, and guided practice to ensure student success.

Our discussions also highlighted the importance of engaging students in literacy learning by acknowledging their interests and strengths, as well as recognizing that the meaning of texts is constructed through the lived experiences of the literacy learner. We defined literacy broadly to incorporate multi-literacies as essential components of classroom literacy practice. Booth et al. (2004) state that "Literacy involves the reader making the most meaning he or she can by negotiating with the interconnecting texts of the reader's world. The multi-literacies depend on the contexts of the reader's life for interpretation" (p. 21). Embedded in this concept of multi-literacies is the recognition that there are multiple ways that students can understand and represent texts. These multiple ways of learning and knowing (for example, art, drama, music, technology) expand the communication potential of all learners (Leland & Harste, 1994) and allow them to share their understandings beyond the traditional linguistic format. This conception of literacy was one we believed to be essential for supporting students' literacy success in a course focused on supporting readers and writers with diverse needs.

4. Pedagogical Approach

Through our discussions we agreed that our overarching goal in the coursework was to employ a constructivist pedagogical approach to learning that recognized the learners' culture and lived experiences. This was to be modelled through our teaching practices so that teachers would leave the course with a deep understanding of how they could apply these pedagogical principles in their own classrooms. Twomey Fosnot (2005a) explains that:

a constructivist view of learning suggests an approach to teaching that gives learners the opportunity for concrete, contextually meaningful experience through which they can search for patterns; raise questions; and model, interpret, and defend their strategies and ideas. The classroom in this model is seen as a mini-society, a community of learners engaged in activity, discourse, interpretation, justification, and reflection. (p. ix)

Inherent in our planning and preparation for courses that reflected constructivist pedagogy was modelling the role of the teacher such that the teacher:

- acts as a mentor,
- collaborates with students to create a supportive community of learners where risk-taking is valued and supported,
- facilitates the learning process to encourage students to take responsibility for and ownership of their own learning, and
- values the contributions of and becomes a learner with the students. (Weaver, 1994)

The strategies and learning experiences taught and modelled in the course supported the following principles of a constructivist approach to learning:

- Learners construct meaning by actively engaging in authentic learning that connects experiences and materials in the classroom and in the world.
- Learning is more likely to endure when the learner sees that it is functional, purposeful and personally relevant.

- Learning is supported by social collaboration where students have opportunities to share their thinking, ask questions, and get feedback and help from others. (Weaver, 1994)

One of the most important principles to support the development of constructivist classrooms was to acknowledge the role of oral language as an integral component of learning—in relation to social communication as a tool for learning, and language as an underpinning to literacy development (Healy, 2006; Westby, 1991). Given what we assumed about the British system which frames the Barbados school culture, we questioned whether purposeful talk had a central role in the teachers' classrooms. We decided to consciously incorporate aspects of oral language, including group work and class discussion, as well as to address aspects of 'home' language and culture as integral to effective learning. We wanted to model learning experiences that would value the learners' knowledge, experience, and expertise. This overlapped with our discussion of literacy education and the need to consider the role of the learners' culture in the classroom. With these guiding principles, we developed the courses and prepared to teach in Barbados.

5. Post-teaching Reflections

Upon our return to Canada, we reflected on our teaching experiences in Barbados, as we were intrigued by the enthusiastic engagement of the learners in both courses and their insightful responses to the coursework. Teacher educators have often discussed the "two world pitfall" (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1989, p. 54) or the "axiological dissonance" (Martin & Russell, 2005, p. 4) in which teachers dismiss academic learning as not relevant to their future teaching practices. This perspective is of particular concern when teaching in an international setting with different cultural traditions, values, and beliefs. In the interests of improving our own teaching practice and informing teaching in higher education in international settings, we developed a study to investigate which aspects of the courses were most beneficial from the perspective of the graduate students and also, what they were able to effectively integrate into their teaching practice in Barbados.

6. Methodology

Research has demonstrated the importance of teachers' voices (Ayer, 1989; McAninch, 1993). As Dewey (1929) has indicated, a teacher's experience can be "the primary source of all inquiry and reflection because it sets the problems, and tests, modifies, confirms or refutes the conclusions of intellectual investigation" (p. 56). Classroom teachers have valuable knowledge and skills to share and gain tacit learning through the 'doing' of actual teaching (Schultz, 2005; Van Arsdell, 1994). However, experiences are "mis-educative" if they are "arresting or distorting for the growth of further experience" (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 25). It is, therefore, important to examine the perceptions of practising teachers concerning the implementation of new knowledge and skills.

To investigate the factors that contributed to the positive outcomes of the courses we taught in Barbados, we engaged in a collaborative, action research study. As the nature of our research was to examine processes and subjective meanings, action

research was the most appropriate approach for gathering data (Mills, 2003; Tomal, 2003). Lloyd (2002) stressed that action research can be a “powerful tool for bringing about change and developing professional practice” (p. 113). However, as Ayers (1989) cautions, “we do not, of course, end up with the truth, but perhaps more modestly with a burgeoning sense of meaning and knowing grounded in real people and concrete practices” (p. 4).

The purpose of the study was two-fold: to gain insight into graduate education students’ application of their knowledge and skills after completing coursework, and to contribute to the research on the pedagogical implications of teaching in the global society. We were curious about identifying which aspects of the courses were most instrumental in contributing to teacher engagement and the resulting changes in the teachers’ understanding of literacy learning. We also questioned ‘if’ and ‘how’ these teachers would be able to implement what they had learned into their classroom teaching practices in Barbados. Lastly, we wanted to explore the implications for improving our own teaching in teacher education programs and to discuss, more broadly, teacher education in international settings.

Selection of Participants

Letters of invitation to participate in this study were sent to all graduate students who completed the courses in literacy learning with one of the researchers during the Summer Institute. One researcher taught 16 secondary teachers and the other researcher taught 26 elementary teachers. Nine (one male and eight females) of the 26 elementary teachers and 13 (one male and 12 females) of the 16 secondary teachers agreed to participate in the study.

Data Collection

A multi-method approach to the data collection involved: focus group sessions, the completion of individual written questionnaires, and researcher teaching notes. This multi-method approach was planned to gather information from whole- group discussions and to allow for individual input in a more private manner. Through the use of focus groups, we wanted to generate discussion among the teachers about their coursework experiences and to explore the impact on their classroom teaching. Focus group sessions were considered the primary source of data collection as “the hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (Morgan, 1997, p. 2).

The use of focus groups is an efficient approach that can be conducted in a reasonably short time frame and yet, promotes in-depth group discussions on participants’ lived experiences. The group discussions can be used to gain an understanding of the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the teachers (Folch-Lyon, de la Macorra, & Schearer, 1981). This approach allows researchers to explore not only the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of a topic but also the reasoning behind the participants’ contributions. However, limitations of these focus groups are that the discussion is all self-reported; it lacks observations in natural settings; it involves all whole- group work; and is guided by the moderator/researcher of the sessions (Morgan, 1997).

Written individual questionnaires of open-ended questions were designed and used in conjunction with the group sessions to allow for individual, private responses and for participants to provide input that may not have been discussed during group sessions. The researchers also kept notes. Focus group sessions, written questionnaires, and researcher notes provided for the triangulation of the data.

Two, one-hour focus groups were conducted: one for the nine elementary teachers with the instructor of their course as the moderator and one for the 13 secondary teachers with the instructor of their course as the moderator. During the focus groups, participants were engaged in discussions related to their coursework and the impact it had on their daily teaching practices. The moderators had a low level of involvement, as the nature of the questions was to gain insights into the participants' perceptions of topics that they identified as important. A second role of the moderators was to ensure that all participants were able to contribute to the discussions and thirdly, to direct the discussions to specific, detailed and concrete aspects of their experiences (Morgan, 1997).

The focus group discussions were video-taped and transcribed. The taping allowed researchers to ensure accuracy of the data, attend to participants' non-verbal behaviour, observe group dynamics, and study their own behaviour as moderators. As there were linguistic and cultural differences between the participants and the researchers, the taping helped to increase the accuracy of the transcriptions of the discussions. Taping sessions can have an influence on what participants are willing to contribute to the discussion. However, the participants were very comfortable with each other and the moderator, so it was decided that the benefits outweighed other concerns. Also, at the end of the focus group discussion, participants were invited to complete an individual researcher-designed questionnaire. All participants completed the questionnaires. This approach enhanced the trustworthiness of the data.

Data Analysis

A detailed and systematic analysis was conducted on the data. The first unit of analysis was the careful coding of the transcripts of the videotapes of the two focus group discussions. The two researchers coded the data separately and then compared results to ensure inter-rater reliability of the coding. Importance of topics was identified based on cross-group topics, number of references to a topic, length of time spent on the topic, and enthusiasm or concern demonstrated (Morgan, 1997). The second unit of analysis was the coding of the written questionnaires, and the third unit of analysis was the researchers' notes. Once completed, we searched the coding from the transcripts, questionnaires, and researchers' notes for emerging patterns of related themes. These themes were compared and contrasted and merged into one case study of graduate students' educational experiences, from the perspective of the participants. The findings of this case study provide rich, detailed accounts of graduate students' experiences in literacy education in an international context.

7. Findings and Discussion

Based on the results of the findings, the following key themes emerged: (a) a broadened understanding of what practising teachers considered to be 'literacy' and its

role in the classroom; and (b) the critical role of a constructivist approach to learning that supports the implementation of course work in teachers' classroom practices. These themes were found to be important elements of teaching and learning in graduate literacy education and for enhancing the transferability of teacher education course work into educational settings in different cultures and contexts.

Broadened View of Literacy

Initially, for the participants, literacy in school was primarily focused on reading school texts with some attention to writing, particularly the mechanics of writing, in relation to specific school-based prompts. During the Summer Institute, the participants enrolled in each of the courses came to understand the concept of 'multi-literacies' which included reading and writing, speaking and listening, as well as viewing and representing a variety of texts. For example, as noted by one participant, they began to see that texts such as comic books, magazines, newspapers, and brochures from local businesses could also be used as texts for teaching reading and writing in the classroom:

...I just thought it (literacy) was like, reading a book, but as [another participant] said, it's reading other printed materials, it's reading the charts, it's reading from what you see on the street, it's reading everything that is in the environment, around you, and that the children find interesting, that you would not have thought you would bring to class.

Teachers also began to recognize the role of literacy across the curriculum. One participant whose teaching assignment was Social Studies commented:

At first when I started the course I was saying this is not really going to be for me because I don't really teach English or language. My main subject is Social Studies. Well, I had an awakening. I recognized that literacy is much wider than just the English and the languages. I recognized that Social Studies and other subjects are also part of literacy as well.

Some teachers began to incorporate Read-Alouds in their teaching practice as a way to model reading, thinking about reading and developing an interest in reading (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; McGee & Schickendanz, 2007). As one participant explained:

What I have used is the Read Aloud. I've used that quite a bit, and I found that as a result of doing that, the children themselves, they started bringing their own things to class to read to the other children. So I found that that helped to spark a bigger interest in reading.

Of particular interest was a shift to acknowledge that literacy could include what the students themselves found interesting, particularly texts from the 'real world' instead of texts primarily situated as part of schooling. This opened up possibilities for students to make connections between literacy and their own lives.

Another aspect of literacy discussed during the course was the need to include more non-fiction in the classroom (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). One participant commented that boys were more engaged in reading when she varied the types of the books in the classroom to include more books dealing with science, cars, and animals.

Drama, as part of classroom practice (McMaster, 1998) rather than large scale productions, was also identified by the participants as part of the broadened understanding of literacy. For example, one participant remarked:

They've learned that drama is not just only to be in costume, or to be in large numbers. It can be a one-man [person] show or a two-man [person] show, right? So therefore, I find that in most aspects of maybe comprehension, composition, mathematics, whatever, we do a bit of role play... and it really is more meaningful for children. They can really see it, they can do it, they can play, and they always want to be interactive.

One of the tenets of teaching writing that was promoted during the course was the importance of giving students a voice and to provide opportunities for them to write about personal experiences (Freire, 1970). The importance of linking writing to oral language was also discussed, as was having students see themselves as writers from the beginning of their literacy experiences. One participant highlighted this fact as well as acknowledging the reciprocity of the reading-writing connection as evident in the following comment:

For me, it was understanding writing to be an important part of literacy, and having children see themselves as writers. We're in the process now of compiling a class book, because a lot of them [emergent writers] can't physically write, but they're giving me their contributions orally, and they're very excited about it, seeing their words in print... And they're more anxious to read what they have written than what someone else has.

The role of oral language, in particular the importance of providing students with opportunities to share their thinking through purposeful talk, was modelled throughout the courses. Teachers had the opportunity to experience using talk to activate prior knowledge, clarify their thinking, make connections, and ask questions through partner, small group and whole class discussions. This focus on 'talk' as a tool for learning led to a discussion of the disconnect in many Barbados classrooms between the students' home language and experiences and their experiences in school.

...we always tell the children, you have to speak appropriately in the classroom, and we tend to like, try to banish their home links from the classroom...

This participant went on to add, however,

...but I remember in the class that we talked about their literacy, home literacy, and we need to include that, and I find that by including that, having children bring their own experiences from within the home, and yes, even if they speak, not standard English, you can turn it around and tell them, well, this is the way to say it, and it makes them more open, and they want to speak more, and they want to interact more in the classroom.

Other participants commented:

I encourage my students to talk about their experiences. I make the experience they have in their homes and communities important to our classroom and the things we do there.

Culture is a way of life so knowing about this will enable students to bring their own learning into the classroom to assist in expanding their knowledge and understanding and to help to enrich others' lives.

Given that students need to connect new knowledge to prior learning (Guthrie, Wigfield & Perencevich, 2004), this recognition of the importance of making home-school links was identified by the participants as one of the key shifts in their teaching. One participant captured this well in her comment,

The students' culture is a necessary part of the learning experience. This is the bank they draw from when they have to make connections with the things being done in the classroom.

Incorporating active learning and diverse ways of knowing, and recognizing the importance of purposeful talk in the classroom were important components of broadening teachers' understanding of what literacy means. Another critical component was exploring the role of home literacy and culture and its connection to school literacy. These aspects of literacy had an identifiable impact on the participants' learning in the courses and teaching practices in their classrooms.

8. Supporting the Pedagogical Principles of Constructivism

A constructivist approach to learning stresses the key role of the learner's active participation and the importance of interactive experiences within the learning environment. The acquisition of knowledge is an adaptive function, and it is through action and reflection on these actions that the learner builds meaning. Based on the work of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and other researchers, the teacher utilizing a constructivist framework recognizes both the cognitive development of the learner as well as the importance of the sociocultural context. The role of the educator is to provide learners with opportunities to construct knowledge in an authentic, meaningful environment (Van Glasersfeld, 2005). Teaching strategies within this environment stress the importance of engaging the learner in hands-on, collaborative activities that encourage and validate different ways of learning and knowing.

Teachers participating in this study frequently noted the benefits of being fully immersed in a constructivist pedagogy and indicated that this enhanced their ability to implement this approach in their own classrooms. For example, one participant noted,

As a teacher it [the course] provided me with techniques and strategies to use in the classroom. I can get the information, read it and interpret it, but can I put it over to my students? This course gave me some of the necessary skills to do this.

Another participant stated that this approach, "... showed how to improvise and make teaching and learning a meaningful classroom experience." Actively engaging in the strategies using course content and then critically reflecting on this process appeared to promote the actual use of this approach to learning:

[Through] personal experiences in class with the tutor [instructor] where strategies were tried and tested, I found that they really, really work. I used these experiences to teach my students with a greater degree of confidence.

Pedagogical approaches that involve modelling and demonstrating strategies and techniques allow individual learners to actively construct meaning as they transact with other learners. This critical aspect of a constructivist approach to learning is highlighted by a participant's response, "It was so empowering to be able to do, as opposed to only listen."

As the teachers began to implement these new strategies which fostered a constructivist approach to learning into their own teaching practices, they observed that there was an increase in student motivation and participation. Participants' comments demonstrate the positive impact this approach has had on their students' learning:

Students have become... active learners – they are able to participate during teaching time. They enjoy doing what they find meaningful. Students learn when they are busy in constructing their learning which must be manageable for them.

The new strategies and skills have empowered me to teach at the level of my students. This enables my students to have a hands-on approach; this helps them to take a greater stake in what they learn. They are more enthusiastic and confident.

Actually, coming out of one of the classes, I got – to me, my most wholesome compliment in my 20 odd years of teaching, when, it was the lesson before lunch, and the bell went, and nobody moved.

Although the focus of this course was on students who struggle with reading and writing, the teachers began to recognize the value of this approach for all learners. As one participant commented, "The new teaching strategies have motivated them [the students] to learn and facilitated their learning. The strategies can be easily applied to all students."

Another positive aspect of the coursework identified by the participants was the opportunity to work collaboratively constructing meaning in a safe, interactive environment where their contributions were respected, valued, critically evaluated, and supported. This approach creates spaces for the learners' voices and respects personal experiences. As noted by Parris (2000), "collaborative forms of learning in the nation's classrooms will help students to live and work in harmony and develop skills in creative and critical thinking" (p. 1). The following comments reflect the participants' shift in their perceptions of collaborative work, their understanding of the value of this approach for their own learning, and the need for an accompanying change in the classroom culture:

I was not particularly fond of collaborative learning/ importance of collaborative group work before but I have come to realize the importance of working in such groups. This has provided me with the opportunity to share and to draw on the experience of my colleagues.

I think the comfort came because the tutor, you were so willing to listen to what we had to say, and there wasn't that environment of where we have to sit, only

a sponge. The comfort came because we were able to interact with each other, and with you, and there wasn't that level of competition, where I compete against you, and I'm not sharing what I have with you. There was this camaraderie and sharing among all of us.

My students also now understand the benefits that can be derived from collaborative learning and the fact that each one has to pull his or her own weight.

As outlined by Weaver (1994), the teacher's role in the learning environment is to become a mentor, a collaborator, and a facilitator supportive of a community of learners. Central to this role is an understanding of the learners' needs in all areas including cognitive, social, and emotional aspects. The participants in this study identified the importance of the instructor (tutor) in each of these courses being sensitive to their needs and providing a safe environment for sharing their personal practical knowledge:

I wanted to emphasize the relaxed environment that we had. You know, going through school, you're constantly being taught, you sit and be quiet, and you listen. But what you brought to us was a more relaxed environment for learning, something that gave you stimulus to really talk.

The participants, in turn, have become sensitive to students' learning needs; , to the impact of the overall atmosphere of the learning environment on student success; , and to the changing role of the teacher:

This course has given me an opportunity to empower my students. Having completed this course I not only see my role in the classroom as the person to impact knowledge, I see my role as to learn from my students...

I have removed myself from the front of the class. I am now among the students.

This [generating discussion] serves to foster relationships among students and help them to better articulate their ideas.

I have affirmed my students and they THRIVED!

These comments resonate with the words of Twomey Fosnot (2005b) who wrote that, "From a constructivist perspective, meaning is understood to be the result of humans setting up relationships, reflecting on their actions, and modelling and constructing explanations" (p. 280). This affirmation of the learner also has many implications for learning for "the way a teacher listens and talks to children helps children become learners who think critically and deeply about what they read and write" (Gould, 2005, p. 102).

The participants in this study stressed the need to support student learning in an atmosphere of open and collaborative inquiry and have gained an awareness and understanding of the situated nature of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The teacher plans, facilitates, guides, models, challenges, scaffolds, and inspires students to expand and extend their learning through diverse ways of learning and knowing in a safe environment. In this manner, learning becomes "active, reflective, and interpretive" (Greene, 2005, p. 116).

9. Final Thoughts

This action research provided an opportunity for the instructors of the courses to reflect on and improve their course content and teaching practices based on this experience in an international setting. With regard to the transferability of pedagogical approaches for post-secondary literacy education in a different cultural setting, the research identified two key factors: (a) the importance of fostering a view of literacy beyond the technical reading and writing of school texts; and (b) the benefits of a constructivist framework for teaching and learning.

This study of teaching in a global context makes an important contribution to teaching in higher education as it provides valuable insights into teachers' conceptualizations of their educational experiences. For as Merriam (1988) asserts, "Research focused on discovery, insight and understanding from the perspective of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education" (p. 3). Participating teachers in this study were given an opportunity to critically reflect critically on their coursework and teaching practices. They highlighted the influences on their construction of meaning, their application of theory into practice, and cultural aspects of literacy learning using a constructivist pedagogy. They gained a renewed sense of enthusiasm for teaching, recognizing the importance of actively engaging the learner in the teaching and learning process. For the researchers, the findings of this study reinforced the need for a multi-literacies approach to literacy education within a constructivist pedagogical framework that values and respects the lived experiences of the learner.

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