

# Positioning Prospective Teachers' Examination of the Hidden Curriculum: A Critical Literacy Context

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**ABSTRACT:** The presentation discusses the first part of a multi-dimensional study including an innovative instructional strategy to further prospective teachers' understanding of critical literacy. In a third-year undergraduate concurrent Education course of study, prospective teachers collaborate in small groups to produce a video presentation that examines the implications of a case-based dilemma (the course is delivered in Problem-Based model that includes a social-constructivist approach to learning). As a component of the video analysis, prospective teachers are required to consider the institutional dimensions of the hidden curriculum that potentially socializes secondary school students into dominant socio-political ideologies. The presentation will discuss how the video analyses assignment fosters prospective teachers' understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). It will detail how CPR can be envisioned differently by prospective teachers. The instructional strategy invites prospective teachers to think reflectively about how they will encourage secondary school students to be more critical of the socio-political implications of schooling and society. In the context of critical literacy, the instructional strategy fosters prospective teachers' examination of how CRP can successfully expose secondary school students to the dominant ideologies and inequities that often contribute to the continued marginalization of certain groups in education and beyond.

**KEYWORDS:** critical literacy, prospective teacher development

## Introduction

As instructional tools, case-studies are considered conducive to the development of participants' reflection and understanding of educational theory and teaching practice. Case-studies provide opportunities for participants to engage authentically in examining their reasoning of the respective issues embedded in each inquiry. In many respects, case-studies address the gap commonly experienced by prospective teachers between research and practice (Keyton & Schockley-Zalaback 2004; Sypher 1997).

It is significant to note that students enrolled in teacher education programs have experienced thousands of hours in public-school classrooms as kindergarten to grade 12 students and have strong impressions, beliefs, and biases of what constitutes teaching and learning (Laskey 2005). In this way, it can be beneficial to invite prospective teachers to consider how the knowledge they acquire in their teacher education courses of study and in experiential education opportunities compare and contrast to their perceptions and experiences as public-school students (Mills & Satterthwait 2000). Relevant to the Problem Based Learning Model (PBL) under discussion, thus, is the significance of transformational learning that points to the importance of learners' interaction with one another in active and constructive roles that enable the fostering of one's identity (Bennetts 2003; Mezirow 2000; 1998). A model based on focused inquiry, such as the hybrid PBL platform under discussion, is also intended to foster participants' examination of their own biases that are often outcomes of their past experiences in educational settings (Kroth & Boverie 2000; McGoldrick et al. 2001; Pohland & Bova 2000).

The hybrid Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model under discussion represents the conceptual framework for a third-year course in a six-year concurrent education program in university located in Ontario, Canada. The PBL model is a hybrid of the more traditional strategies typically used in medical and legal professional schools (Cherubini 2020).

Specifically, prospective teachers are provided with various opportunities to determine their own learning needs, identify the key objectives of the inquiry, consult an array of resources further to those provided in the course, and reflect upon their perceptions in juxtaposition to the voices and opinions of others. The instructional model endorses prospective teachers' capacity to think critically about both the new knowledge they acquire as part of the inquiry process as it does invite them to account for their past experiences as grade- and secondary-school students (Cherubini 2019).

### **Context: A Hybrid Problem-Based Learning Model**

As a unique learning platform PBL encourages prospective teachers' informed perspectives into the behaviour of case-base subjects. Through case-study, prospective teachers consider thoughtfully the implications of ethical practice in the context of teaching and learning. The hybrid PBL model facilitates a structured and systematic means of promoting focused discussion between prospective teacher students in regard to case-subjects' actions and circumstances and contributes to prospective teachers' emerging appreciation of the professional roles and responsibilities of being a teacher.

The hybrid PBL model entails a specific implementation process in order for prospective teachers to engage fully in the respective case-based inquiries. As discussed in Cherubini (2017), the implementation process is adaptable to suit the unique predicaments and circumstances of each cohort of student participants. After individually reading the case, prospective teachers document, using a free-style writing approach, what they perceive to be are the most significant themes and/or developments in the case. In small groups, the prospective teachers are provided with the necessary time to share then discuss these initial thoughts. Each member of the group is then tasked with the responsibility to consult either a professional educator, a relevant interprofessional, a parent/caregiver of a school-aged student relatively close in age to the case-based student, or two peer-reviewed academic journals relevant to the case inquiry. The prospective teacher participants are then provided the time to share and discuss the insights from each of the solicited perspectives. They are also required to discuss the bodies of standards related to the professional and ethical expectations of teachers in Ontario (Canada). Among the objectives is to develop prospective teachers' understanding of how the profession determines responsible action and ethical behaviour (see, for example, Cheney, May & Munshi 2001; May & Mumby 2005).

The hybrid PBL model includes a distinct aspect of professional collaboration and a unique approach to learning that is grounded in theory and practice. For prospective teachers, the opportunity to examine case-based issues and circumstances facilitates their emerging appreciation of teaching and learning in broader contexts. The PBL model allows prospective teachers to revisit their preliminary thoughts and perceptions, engage in peer-discussion, and be thoughtful about their learning of the case-based issues. By engaging in the inquiry process prospective teachers are situated in the tension of professional and ethical issues that often have significant implications on practice (Cherubini 2017).

### ***Theoretical Context***

As a requirement of the third-year concurrent Education course, each small group cohort of prospective teachers produce a video presentation to examine the implications of a particular case. Prospective teachers are provided with key resources and policy documents that may inform their case-based inquiry. The resource includes links to the provincial curriculum (both elementary and secondary), assessment and evaluation policies in Ontario, resources related to special education, Indigenous education, and equity and inclusive education. See, for example:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/>; <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/secondary.html>; <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/learning.html>; <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/inclusiveguide.pdf>.

Each group is expected to select at least one document and cite specifically how the information in the policy contributes and informs their understanding of the case-based dilemma. Each PBL group's video presentation discusses the significant considerations and outcomes of the case from a specific lens. The lens on "Learners," for example, considers case-based teachers' treatment of learners in classroom environments, if/how learners are used as a reference for decisions about when the teacher moves on to new material, and the sense of competition or cooperation between students in a classroom. Conversely, the PBL group may select a "Broader Context" lens to examine problems facing case-based teachers and students that may be attributed to problems in society at large, in the school organization, in individual students, or student's families.

As a component of the video analysis, prospective teachers are required to consider the institutional dimensions of the hidden curriculum that can socialize secondary school students into dominant socio-political ideologies. According to Thomas and Dyches (2019) students are "socialized through the hidden curriculum to accept ideologies that are the outcomes of dominant hegemonic practices that further contribute to inequitable relations (see also Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, & Petrone, 2014; Rahman, 2013). This focus on the hidden curriculum contributes to prospective teachers' awareness of the important effects related to how students perceive themselves, their teachers, and other stakeholders across the learning environment of public-school classrooms and schools. In turn, prospective teachers use PBL to examine culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in the respective case-based inquiries. Culturally relevant pedagogy includes consideration of students' experiences in public education, including their sense of achievement, recognition of cultural presence, and their informed and deep awareness of the socio-cultural variables that impact their education as unique learners (Aronson & Laughter 2016; Jacobs 2019; Ladson-Billings 2014).

### **Educational Significance: Critical Literacy**

The PBL model being presented facilitates prospective teachers' reflection on their learning about the concepts related to both the hidden curriculum and CRP and subsequently how this learning translates into practice. Prospective teachers acquire a better understanding of the necessity to encourage secondary school students to critique their own biases and participate meaningfully in learning cultures where students of all socio-cultural backgrounds have a voice. The model provides opportunities for prospective teachers to consider and examine the implications of these inclusive practices on not only their instruction, but on their future students as well. Prospective teachers are afforded the space to discuss, reflect, and appreciate how concepts related to implicit bias influences not only the process of how they will select the texts and resources they will implement in their classrooms, but also how they project their approach to literacy instruction with students (see, for example, Scales & Tracy 2017; Solorzano & Yosso 2002). This is to recognize that "literacy is about more than reading or writing – it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture" (OME Language Document 2006, p. 3).

Additionally, and very significantly, literacy (as it aligns to the above context) is linked to prospective teachers' heightened understanding of critical literacy as a means of developing students as active agents in their own learning with the ability to question the socio-historic power relations in both their own education and across the larger community (Goodman and CoCCA 2014; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje 2007). Prospective teachers better understand how critical literacy, as a constructivist learning strategy, positions students' lived

experiences at the center of their learning (Lee 2012; Vasquez 2019). The PBL model affords prospective teachers to consider critical literacy, from these perspectives, as a method to encourage students to examine and be critical of ideologies that perpetuate the silencing of marginalized voices (Kazembe 2017; Locke and Cleary 2011; Luke 2014). The PBL model that serves as the discussion of this presentation encourages prospective teachers to consider critical literacy as a way of providing opportunities for K to 12 students to, at the very least, begin to consider topics of equity and social justice and participate meaningfully in a more inclusive culture of schooling that recognizes all voices and perspectives (Wilson 2014).

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