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Using Teachers' Volunteer Experiences in the Dominican Republic to Develop Social Responsibility in Canadian Middle-School Students: An 'Authors in the Classroom' Approach

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Abstract:

This study evaluated the potential utility of teachers' volunteer service-learning experiences abroad to change the perceptions and actions of North American students toward cultural others. A team of Canadian teachers working with local children in the Dominican Republic used the literacy intervention Authors in the Classroom program to guide these children in authoring identity texts about themselves and their families. These multi-layered texts are discussed with emphasis on the children's understanding of their social situation. The teachers later shared these texts with a group of Canadian Grade 8 students and had them produce their own texts. The Canadian students showed a range of depth in their understanding of the lives of impoverished children, as well as a range of responses toward action for social justice.

Media representations of children from developing countries typically characterize them as helpless victims whose survival depends on the sympathy of foreigners. Television advertisements and billboards show malnourished children with outstretched arms and sad eyes waiting for a handout. The children in these displays rarely speak. Thus, the message conveyed is that, without the foreigners who speak *for* them, children in the developing world have no voice. At a very young age, children in North American countries absorb these stereotypes of the downtrodden "global South." Because discussions of the effects of globalization on the world's developing regions are thought to be too complex for young students to understand, civic education programs in North America largely have been limited to a focus on the simple memorization of facts. As a result, North American children are likely to think that their peers in developing countries live in poverty due to their own bad choices. They may also adopt an apathetic, "blame the victim" mentality. Such perceptions have a negative impact on all children.

In Canada, immigrant children, who are often from global South regions, are affected by having their identities reflected in negative ways. These images can have a deleterious impact on their academic success as well as on their view of what is possible for them.

Through schools, communities, and the mass media, many immigrant children receive the message that their voices do not matter and that they have less value than others (Berta-Ávila, 2003). Stereotypes of children from developing countries as being downtrodden and helpless are also problematic for Canadian-born children who, as a result of frequent exposure to stereotyping, may grow up with a distorted view of the world. They may not only lack the ability to appreciate the strengths and the value that immigrants can bring to their lives, but are also likely to lack an awareness of the power that they have to work toward social justice causes.

The current study was undertaken to determine the extent to which a program based on learning from a teacher's experience in a global development context could be effective in changing Canadian students' perceptions of those living in very different circumstances in other parts of the world. The focus of this article is to document how a group of Canadian teachers used their volunteer experiences in the Dominican Republic to develop a program for their students in Peterborough, a small city in Southern Ontario.

The project, based on a literacy intervention, the Authors in the Classroom program (ACP), had two stages. The first involved an experience at a summer camp for children in the Dominican Republic[1]. The second stage took place in a Canadian classroom. Following a brief review of the literature, the first two sections of this paper describe these two phases of the project. The third and fourth sections explore how this experience helped the Canadian students to become actively engaged in reflecting on the situation of young people like them in other parts of the world, and in considering issues of social justice.

The authors of the paper were involved in both the Dominican and Canadian phases of the project. The first author, a native Spanish-speaker, lived in Chile until she was 16 years of age. She later moved to Puerto Rico and then to Canada. Upon receiving her doctorate, she became a professor in the area of education. The second author undertook her teacher education degree in both the U.S. and Canada and has a working knowledge of Spanish. She is presently a middle-school teacher in Canada. The third author is a Dominican teacher who is currently enrolled in a master's program in education in her country, and is the director of one of the two public schools in Cabarete, in the province of Puerto Plata. She is monolingual in Spanish. The fourth author is a Canadian school counselor with a long history of working with social justice projects in developing countries. She is a student in a Canadian faculty of education and is beginning to learn Spanish.

Authors in the Classroom and Other Approaches to Developing Social Responsibility

Based on Freire's (1973) conscientization theories, the Authors in the Classroom program (ACP) was developed to improve the possibility of more equitable outcomes of education for all children. Originated by Ada and Campoy (2003), it was implemented at the early education level under the name, Early Authors Program (EAP) (see Bernhard, Cummins, Campoy, Ada, Winsler & Bleiker, 2006; Bernhard, Winsler, Bleiker, Ginieniewicz & Madigan, 2008). The ACP/EAP is a transformative literacy model in which children self-author books or "identity texts" about themselves, their families, and their goals. Scanned photographs and word processing are used to create the books, which allow children, parents, and caregivers to communicate and share their personal experiences. The process of

self-authoring books aims not only at enriching children's print motivation, increasing their vocabulary, and enhancing their phonemic awareness, but also at strengthening links between and among children, their families, and educators. Moreover, the process is geared toward the acquisition of a strong sense of self-worth and pride in cultural identity.

Educators have used a variety of approaches to encourage children to react positively to cultural "others" who look, act, or think differently from the way they do. For example, in a recent article, "Understanding Islam," Gunel (2008) provided background information on Islam for use by elementary grade teachers. He cautioned readers by saying, "There is no way to 'sum up' one of the world's great religions in all its complexity, diversity, and history" (p. 9). One can see the problematic or double-edged sword in studies of diversity. The result can be the exoticization of those persons, making them seem as a static, homogeneous group.

Cullinan, Dove, Estice, and Lanka (2008) reported on a school-wide effort in a middle-school in Phoenix aimed at helping children become conscious of different world cultural perspectives, living conditions, and lifestyles. Through a series of activities undertaken across courses such as language arts, world history, and a course called "Connections," the teachers scaffolded students' global "perspectiveness consciousness" and helped them to develop "worldmindedness" (p. 18). School-wide activities included the development of critical-thinking skills, the use of multicultural and global children's literature, the use of fiction and non-fiction historical accounts, arranged meetings with newcomer students from various countries, and organized a Middle East Summit. The authors reported that students became increasingly interested in making global connections to coursework and deepened their understanding of how people live in other countries:

> We see our students getting beyond stereotypes and surface culture and asking questions about beliefs, values, and cultural norms. In a recent discussion with a guest from Sierra Leone, students asked what he thought would resolve the conflict over diamond mining and what his family in Freetown valued most about their quality of life. These questions are a far cry from the usual things often asked by twelve year olds such as, "Do you see lions in your backyard?" or, "What clothes do people wear?" (Cullinan et al., 2008, p. 21).

This approach has many promising aspects. However, Cullinan et al. noted that two key factors in achieving "worldmindedness" and raising "perspectiveness consciousness" are involved: a) defining a set of assumptions that can be shared by all the teachers in a given school, and (b) setting a long-term, school-wide goal. Given the present North American school climate, where the main priority is improved test scores, it is unrealistic to expect many schools in the hemisphere to engage in a process geared toward the definition of shared assumptions regarding social justice issues.

The viability of a single teacher organizing a social studies class to engage children in real life experiences that connect them to living cultures of the developing world has also been the topic of previous research. In a recent study, Sider (2008) reported on how a Pen Pals project between children in the U.S. (New York) and India was integrated into a third-grade classroom curriculum. By corresponding

with children in India, the American students became excited about learning. The experience empowered them to know that they could make a difference by helping other people. The pen pals addressed topics such as their favorite foods, the national flower, and the animals their families kept at home. For example, one student wrote, "I have a goat at home. It gives us milk. There is sand everywhere in my village. I like peacocks but there are too many peacocks in my village" (Sider, 2008, p. 26). In addition to the dangers of exoticizing mentioned previously, Sider noted that the children had to wait seven weeks before receiving a reply from India because the children there did not yet know how to write in English. Such limitations are problematic.

Based on the work of Freinet (1969/1975), who arranged pairings between classes in France as early as 1924, a number of global learning networks have been established with much success. One such approach has been the Orillas project (De Orilla a Orilla [From Shore to Shore], 2008), where clusters of class-to-class collaborations have led students from dozens of countries to use technology to take part in a collaborative learning exchange over long distances. Sample projects over the past decade have included letter writing, a proverbs project, and an oral history project.

These comprehensive approaches have been highly successful in allowing children to compare and contrast aspects of their world, as well as strengthen inter-generational communication by having parents and grandparents contribute valuable folk knowledge. In their review of such approaches, Cummins, Brown, and Sayers (2007) distinguished between "methods" that focus on uncritical implementation of pre-packaged curricula and "pedagogical techniques" that "employ innovative tools and instruments that help establish new relationships between students and teachers, providing invaluable feedback as educators reflect on and improve their practice" (p. 122).

Another promising approach to changing stereotypes and encouraging students to take action for social justice causes is service-learning, in which students are sent to developing countries to experience directly the social and educational space of those living there. Although there is substantial literature on the positive effects of service-learning on adolescents (e.g., Scales, Blyth, Berkas, & Kielsmeier, 2000), travel costs and limited student resources for associated expenses prevent wide-scale implementation. Further, since these experiences take place at a time when students are often highly concerned with aspects of their own coming of age, adolescents undertaking service-learning experiences may be more focused on their ability to build relationships and gain confidence. They may do this at the expense of the primary reason for the service-learning experience: understanding the reasons for poverty in the global South as being part of the history of colonialism, as well as the consequences of globalization and unfair trade policies. A possible way of overcoming these limitations is to translate teachers' service-learning experiences in development contexts back into their classrooms, so that they can function in some manner for students as a substitute for direct, on-site, adolescent service-learning.

The Teachers' Service-Learning Project in the Dominican Republic

The teachers' service-learning work in the present study involved participation in a six-week summer camp for impoverished children in the Dominican Republic. The camp was located

in a small town created as a result of population displacement in the tourist area of Cabarete, located on the northern coast of the country. In spite of the large number of tourists that visit Cabarete every year, and the substantial number of foreigners who make it their permanent residence, the area is characterized by extreme poverty. Many homes lack running water and electricity, and the majority of the population earn less than two dollars a day (Dominican DREAM, 2009). This level of poverty has arisen largely because traditional ways of earning a living were terminated with the takeover of coastal land by big hotel chains.

Unable to survive under these conditions, many Dominicans have simply left their country. The U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo issues the world's third highest number of immigrant visas to the U.S. Roughly one out of seven Dominicans is now thought to live, legally or illegally, in the U.S. Among those who have remained on the island, many have been forced to relocate and/or to find new livelihoods to replace traditional ones. In Cabarete, the more impoverished youngsters have a higher likelihood of eventually being employed in service or engaging in marginal activities such as prostitution or in actual illegal undertakings. For many, prostitution may seem preferable to the lowliest jobs. In what follows, it is important to realize that the dreams young people have for actual careers based on university education have only the remotest possibility of coming true.

Within this context of social and economic struggle, the summer camp program we attended included not only arts and sports activities but also an academic component referred to as La Academia, where all four of the co-authors worked as teachers. We were participants in the process we were studying. Because of our Latina backgrounds and native-speaker capabilities, two of us (JB and YM) were able to immerse ourselves in the culture. Our method entailed fully engaged participant observation along with the types of approaches used by other action researchers (Fenstermacher, 1994). Respect and recognition for the local teachers' knowledge was the starting point for the implementation of the program. In addition to improving the literacy skills of the 150 children who participated in the summer camp, the goal of the program was to provide a space in which Dominican students could awaken their voices to reflect and dialogue about their life experiences. At the end of the 6-week program run in accordance with the ACP/EAP principles previously described, all of the 150 Dominican children taking part had created a 10-page book about themselves, their families, and their aspirations.

The program began by introducing the students to a "Word Wall" containing meaningful words from their environment and positive adjectives that they could use in their writing. Then the authoring project began with an acrostic-- for each letter of their name, the children would write adjectives that described aspects of themselves. Many of the students tended to use relationship-based words to describe themselves (e.g., friend, sister, grandchild), as well as words describing their physical and altruistic attributes. For example, Adarleni, a 12-year-old, rather pretty girl, authored the following acrostic:

A *adorable* (adorable)
D *deliciosa* (delicious)
A *amiga* (friend)
R *responsable* (responsible)
L *linda* (pretty)
E *excelente* (excellent)
N *noble* (noble)
I *inteligente* (intelligent)

One can see Adarleni's absorption of stereotypes about the value associated with

being a pleasing and attractive young woman. She does not deny her intelligence, but she places much more emphasis on being "delicious" and "pretty." One might add, without reference to Adarleni's particular case, that many of the mothers and sisters of these young women, entirely impoverished and without job prospects because of the local Dominican economy, were selling their bodies at expensive nearby hotels, where being perceived as delicious and pretty was a desirable asset for the job.

Aderlani, however, declined our offer to attach her photo to the book that she had drawn up so carefully. She said, "I am too ugly; my teeth are bad." She resisted all of our reassurances that she looked fine and that the photo would add to the book. We wondered if the adjectives she supplied were more applicable to her as she wanted to be, rather than to what she actually believed. It is also possible that she was attempting to meet what she perceived to be our expectations-- that she would be very proud of herself and desirable in every way.

Julio Jimenez, a 9-year-old boy, was brought to school each day by his older sister who was also enrolled in the program. Both the Dominican teachers and children often described Julio as a problem child with many behavior problems and lack of attentiveness. The teachers reported that he did not know how to write and did not participate in any school activities. After observing his peers writing for two, 2-hour sessions, Julio wrote the following:

> I am intelligent and I like math. What I want most is to be a good person so that I can have a better future and learn a great deal.

When we read Julio's text, we were extremely surprised. He had obviously mastered cursive writing in a straight line with spaces left between the words. As well, he had achieved competence in basic spelling and grammar at a higher level than his classmates. Further, while he was engaged in the writing, he was well-behaved and attentive. At the end of the session, Julio frequently wanted to continue writing and did not want to leave. His pride was evident when, at the end of the summer, he was chosen as one of the students who read their book outloud to the entire community. In contrast to Adarleni who emphasizes her attractiveness, Julio is emphasizing his competence and ability to function academically. Further, in his view of himself, he is obviously resisting the attributions made to him by his teachers.

As a follow up to the acrostic, a number of the children continued with the theme *"Yo Soy"* (I am). Many of their passages showed that despite the impoverishment of their families and the precarious economic situation caused by the Dominican Republic's tourist economy, they retained pride in themselves and in their country. For example, David's page read as follows: "I am proud to be Dominican, I like the music and the beach." Other students wrote in detail about Dominican food-- rice, beans, chicken, and coleslaw. The Dominican flag appeared frequently in these pages.

Another section of the Dominican children's books was entitled *"Yo Puedo"* (I can). The students, who were very motivated to work on this page, wrote about what they could do. Many of them wrote about how they could help their community. Adarleni wrote, "I can help. I can help old people. I can be a good student."

In a third page of their books, the students wrote about what they wanted to be. Although many of the responses were along expected gender lines (girls wanting to be models and

boys doctors), the children had high academic aspirations, and many wanted to go to university and be teachers, architects, and lawyers--all socially engaged professions. They often spoke of helping to better their community through their chosen vocation. In many ways, these are the aspirations one hears from most children; yet the consciousness of the means necessary to achieve these aims escapes them. The dreams of children who do not live in favorable circumstances represent their resistance to their more limited life outcomes that are almost inescapable.

It was evident that the students had complex identities; they wrote about what they wanted to be as working people with important places in the communities as well as the leisure pastimes they could imagine. Madelin, an 8-year-old whose artistic talent was recognized by her peers and who was often asked for her help in drawing, wrote, "I want to be a lawyer, painter, teacher, and dancer."

At the end of each session, the entire group of children gathered to share their writing with each other. Hearing what their peers had written often led to discussions about equity and social justice. The students reflected on the themes of empowerment and provided examples of inequity and discrimination from their own life situations. A number of the students talked about wanting to reunite with their parents in Europe or North America. Still others reported working long hours before and after school to be able to help their parents, who could not find employment.

The Dominican teachers who worked in the summer camp provided feedback indicating that they were encouraged by moving away from a "banking" model of education to more of a "problem- posing" model (Freire, 1973). One of them said:

> It was a marvelous project. The speed with which the children became motivated to learn was impressive. They were able to express themselves and imagine what they wanted from their lives. The children still talk to me about their books and have lots of ideas of more books they could write. When the project ended, we [the teachers] went back to working with much more limited resources but the seed has been well planted. We now know that there are ways to create motivation through self- expression and we are hopeful about the possibilities.

By implementing a transformative literacy project that involved the creation of student-authored identity texts, the Canadian teachers were able to create a space to work in solidarity with local Dominican teachers.

Bringing the Experience Back to a Canadian Classroom

Upon returning from their 6-week, service-learning journey, the Canadian team set out to share the experience with a group of 23 children enrolled in a Grade 8 classroom. Historically, their school has served mostly white, middle-class students. But in recent years, its population has changed to include more children living in poverty as well as a substantial number of immigrant students, many of whom are from Latin America.

Like the Dominican children, the students in the Canadian classroom were guided in authoring identity texts about themselves and their families. With the introduction of each component of the program, the students were told about how the Dominican children approached the task. They were also shown the books made by the Dominican children, and they heard stories about the lives and aspirations of particular children in

the summer camp. The goal of the program in Canada was that by exploring their own stories and listening to the stories of the children in the Dominican summer camp, Canadian students could become more informed about the lives of children in the global South. Moreover, it was hoped that they could be prepared to take action in the area of social justice. For example, they were shown pictures about a Dominican child their age called David who, in addition to going to school, held two jobs to contribute to his family's income. David's identity book elaborated his wish to be a doctor so he could help the people in his community. At first, the students expressed sympathy for David's circumstances. As they progressed through the program, they began to see him as a fellow 13-year-old. They asked many questions about the dedication page that mentioned David's mother and grandmother.

Hearing about the struggles and hopes of children like David led the class to dialogue about the causes of poverty in the world. Students researched causes of poverty, and were especially interested to learn about displacement of local people on the coast to make room for beachfront hotels. They commented on how the Dominican people must feel about being unable to earn a living with dignity. Students also talked about unfair trade policies and foreign debt. The students realized how the global economy had affected and impoverished Caribbean and Latin American countries.

When writing their books on their own hopes and dreams, they also wrote a section on their wishes for the world in which they live. One of the students in the Canadian classroom, Abigail, wrote:

> We can bring about change in our world, and make a difference. Our country has enough money and resources that could be given to a foreign country, and our generation will have the power to make those decisions.

Juan, an immigrant to Canada said:

> It is important to raise awareness. We have to let others know what is happening around our world, and make them aware of the dreadful circumstances they are living in because of [Dominicans] having been forced to move from their homes to make room for the big hotels and now they can't fish like they used to.

One student dedicated her book to the special people in her life:

> I want to thank my teacher for assigning the authoring project. It made me open my eyes and look ahead to the future, and the difference I can make in the world. This helped me dig deep and see what kind of person I am and what is important in my life.

The students reflected on whether it was possible for their generation to end poverty in the world in their lifetime. Victoria wrote:

> Even though we are so young, we can still be aware of these issues. We can spread awareness about poverty and show people the living conditions around the world. Our generation definitely has the power to end poverty.

The students were also shown picture slides of the Dominican Republic, noting the contrast between the lush rainforests, pristine beaches, and booming resorts and the harsher realities of conditions in which the children attending the summer camp lived. As a class,

students also talked about poverty in the world, the causes of poverty, and who might be able to contribute to its alleviation. The students were outraged that there wasn't more responsible tourism, and could not understand why more tourists did not help the countries they were visiting. Vanessa, a 13-year old student born in Canada said, "It is so unfair and disrespectful that the hotel owners do not do more to support the communities since they used to live and work there before."

The students in the Canadian classroom also wrote a page in their book on a person they admired who had experienced adversity. They wrote about obstacles that this person had had to overcome, and the impact that they had in the world. Students wrote about people such as Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Oprah Winfrey, and Terry Fox. An important lesson was that one individual does have the potential to influence at least a corner of the world.

All these experiences led to the students in the Canadian classroom initiating a school-wide Social Justice Club to launch a "Make a Difference Campaign." The campaign involved classroom discussions, activities, and reflective books on issues around the world as well as an investigation of non-governmental organizations that help children. Students prepared awareness slideshows and presented them to younger students in classrooms throughout the school. These slideshows focused on how alternative income projects benefit people in developing countries. For example, they showed the younger children a slide of a cow, and then asked them to brainstorm all of the products that come from a cow. The Grade 8 students helped the younger students see how purchasing a cow for a family would not only provide the family with nourishment, but also help them to produce milk, cheese and other products to sell in the market. They also showed slides of sewing machines, goats, and pigs with the same message of sustainability.

The students also coordinated a benefit concert that showcased school talent, speakers using slideshows to discuss world issues, and a silent auction to raise funds for alternative income projects for villages where people had been displaced by the hotel industry. The students performed skits, recited poems, danced, and played music. Students also collected donated items for the silent auction, which raised $1,100.00. One student wrote a song about a mother watching over her child. While the song was performed, a slideshow played in the background showing mothers from all over the world with their children. The song talked about the fact that we are one world, we share the same values of love and dignity, and together we can build a better tomorrow.

In order to give the students additional contact with those who are different from them, a number of guest speakers were invited into the classroom. The first, from Guatemala, had been a teacher there, while her husband worked as a police officer. She shared how she was 8 months pregnant when she and her husband fled the country in search of a safer life. After many struggles and legalities, they eventually were accepted as refugees into Canada, where she now works as an educational assistant. The students were very quiet when she finished speaking. They were both surprised and saddened to hear of the adversity she had experienced.

Students also heard from a guest from Honduras who shared his stories of faith, hope, love, compassion, and pride for his country. He told the students stories of his life growing up in an orphanage, and the care and love he received

there. He has since trained as a teacher and a paramedic, and has received his law degree. He told the students about how he was taken to the orphanage as a baby, and how there was no record of his birthday. After 8 years without celebrating a birthday, the "*tias*" (aunts) in the orphanage made up a date for him to celebrate. The students in the Canadian classroom were surprised to hear about someone not knowing their birthday. They asked the guest how he felt about not having his birthday celebrated or not receiving gifts. The speaker was equally surprised that the students were so focused on birthday questions.

Students also heard stories of a recent immigrant from Rwanda who lived in a refugee camp in Kenya for 7 years prior to moving to Canada. He talked about the importance of water and education, and he spoke of his conviction that anything is possible in life. The class was very interested in this topic and asked questions about how to live with only a small amount of portioned potable water in a hot climate.

Voices of the Grade 8 Students in Canada

At the end of the school year, an exit interview was conducted with 10 of the 23 students in the Canadian Grade 8 classroom. The interviews, which were audio-taped, transcribed, and coded, evaluated the students' views in the following domains: (a) perceptions of immigrant children, (b) effects on their own sense of identity, and (c) the possibility of adding their voices to act for social justice causes. The 10 open-ended items in the interview included questions such as, "What are your thoughts about the lives of the children whose books you've read?" and, "How do their dreams compare with your own?" Further, there were questions about the possible indirect effects on the Canadian student regarding issues related to social justice, such as, "To what extent has this experience inspired you to want to take action in your community?"

Perceptions of children from developing countries. A frequently cited answer to the question of how the program had affected their views on immigrant children had to do with an understanding of the complexity of their lives. When the students' responses were analyzed, it became evident that many had never heard of the Dominican Republic, and were uncertain as to where it was located. Three students in the class had actually visited the country on family vacations, and one of these, who was himself an immigrant to Canada, talked about his realization that everyone had a story—about the journey of their life, struggles, hopes and dreams:

> Before this year, I knew about the Dominican Republic because my family had gone there on vacation. When we went outside the resort, we saw lots of homeless people. The only children there were beggars on the street. They were all helpless and wanted money, so we were told not to talk to them. Now I realize that every kid I met there has a story and you don't know anything about them until you get to know what they have to go through, how their life is difficult, and yet they still try to do well in school. It is inspirational to see how motivated they are.

The students tended to focus on Dominican children's sense of agency and their many strengths. Josie, a Canadian-born student, said:

> When I read the book that David [Dominican child] wrote, it was so cool. He was just like us, smart and

> interesting. Now I see them as equals. They are so proud that they work hard to get what they want. They can help us to learn lots of different things, like languages. I want to learn Spanish. It is such a good language.

The Canadian children's view of poverty did not, in many cases, lead to sympathetic understanding. The feelings that we saw in evidence included pity as well contempt. At the extreme, it was stated that the people were lazy or dishonest. More commonly, we sensed that the plight of these people was regarded as inescapable, and therefore not of immediate concern to people who are better off. Racial labels were applied along similar lines. For example, during a field trip, a group of South African university students were referred to as "ghetto".

Effects on their own sense of identity. A number of students reported that the program had helped them to reflect on their own lives. A Canadian-born student whose language and culture is English said:

> Writing the books gives you more knowledge about what is going on outside of your life. Our heads are stuck here and there is so much we need to think about. My life is a lot easier than I thought before when I took everything for granted. I don't have to work. I have enough food. And still we get grumpy for small reasons. They have 10 times more things to worry about and they still manage to get ahead.

The program also helped the immigrant students in the Canadian classroom develop positive perceptions of themselves. A Colombian student who had been in Canada for 3 years offered the following comment about the Dominican children who participated in the ACP/EAP:

> The books showed us that they have a lot to face in life: go to work, support a family, and go to school. I'm a Latin American, so when I heard about them, I felt proud that they were hard workers who never gave up. It made me stand up and realize what kind of good background I come from. I was proud to be an immigrant.

Notwithstanding our findings about feelings of solidarity with other Latin Americans who perhaps also had a chance to better themselves through immigration, we often found a sharp sense of difference and a sense of nationalism coupled with superiority. Many of the Canadian Hispanic students were from Colombia, especially the white middle class, and they often spoke of the Dominicans as poor, non-white, and lacking in the talents and enterprise that one finds in Colombians.

Desire to act for social justice causes. About half of the Canadian students developed concrete ideas about how they could take action toward a better world. Common responses included, "I would like to go to the Dominican Republic to do what my teacher did. I am trying to persuade my church youth group to go there," or, "I have an aunt who is a nurse and I will see if she can help me bring stuff down for their hospital," and, "I would like to go there to bring some books to them so they can continue to be authors. We can even help them to build houses or even a school." One of the immigrant children in the class summed up the views of many by saying, "I was not used to thinking that I could change the world. We are the next generation and even if not everyone is the same, we all deserve the right to have a proper place to go to school."

Among these children, however, we found some assumptions about superiority. Some of them thought in terms of Canadians fixing things, or their educating the poor people about how to remedy the obvious problems. Broader structural understandings were generally not present. Even some of the Canadian students who were inspired about "social justice" seemed to understand their potential for social action more in terms of "charity" actions rather than, say, social protest in Canada to change trade policies.

At least half of the Canadian students were not very much engaged with the plight of poor Dominicans thousands of miles away. Transient feelings of pity and a desire to move on to some interesting topics such as sports were seen in these students. Their world was, in essence, entirely insulated from that of the Dominican people and children, and such awareness as existed would be a passing thought about the misfortunes of other people in the world.

Discussion

Finding ways to address and eliminate the stereotypes that North American students hold about children in the developing world is central to intercultural co-existence and the development of an enlightened and active citizenry. This study evaluated the potential utility of using teachers' volunteer service-learning experiences abroad to change the perceptions and actions of North American students. Results of this study show that service-learning journeys undertaken and later reported on or "translated" by teachers hold great promise for dispelling students' stereotyped and prejudicial attitudes toward those in the global South.

First, there is some evidence that students in the Canadian classroom were able to appreciate and value the motivation and determination that children in the Dominican Republic showed through their self-authored books. By developing a program based on their travel experience, the teachers succeeded in many ways in helping their students move beyond simplistic attitudes about helpless, voiceless peoples to understand the current reality of children living in contexts in which their development is limited because of unfavorable socio-economic conditions. At the same time, the problem of seeing the Dominican children and families in terms of stereotypes, or as simply being "other," was not fully solved. We have reviewed evidence of the Canadian students' assumptions regarding their own superiority or their views about the reasons for the poverty of the Dominican children. Although the teachers took pains to discuss structural and economic issues, the Canadian students in many cases continued to understand the children's plight in terms of individual abilities and efforts.

Second, evidence shows that Canadian students' involvement in the same kind of transformative literacy project as was provided to the Dominican children led many of them to reflect on their own lives and their emerging sense of identity as citizens of the world. We also have noted some of the qualifications to this finding. Third, and most important, a number of students came to articulate the possibility of adding their efforts to the cause of social justice, including working in the South. At the same time, we noticed that a few were not fundamentally affected. Having noted some pitiful circumstances that were far removed from them, they simply wanted to move on to more interesting topics that they saw as directly affecting themselves. That being said, no curriculum component is a panacea for social ills, especially those far away, and we believe that, in general, we raised the Canadian students' consciousness of the human face of the effects of globalization in the southern countries.

A key element of the program was the socially transformative nature of the Authors in the Classroom/Early Authors Program, a literacy intervention incorporating empowerment and identity strategies. The focus was on the creation of meaningful self-authored texts, with the assumption that this approach would motivate children to see that, although everyone has a voice that is important to hear, many voices have been submerged because of experiences of oppression and alienation coming from both internalized colonial oppression and autocratic methods of child rearing. Minority children's identity and valuation of their language and culture are known to be important factors in their success at school. In particular, as Cummins (2004) and others have pointed out (Corson, 1993, 1998; Dolson, 1985; Hagman & Lahdenpera, 1998), if one respects the child's home language and culture, the acquisition of English can be an additive process, which is to say, the student moves toward a bilingual and bicultural identity without losing the home language and culture.

The results here are consistent with, yet extend, those found in other studies evaluating efforts to counter children's mis-information and discriminatory attitudes that lead to inequalities (e.g., Cullinan et. al, 2008; Sider, 2008). A message that ran through the interview data was that although the students in both countries lived very different lives, they shared the goal of wanting to pursue a good education and act for social justice. By having teachers focus on these common threads that characterize the experiences of students from different parts of the world, the tendency to "other-ize" was minimized, and replaced instead by a sense of inspiration and awe for the Dominican students' efforts in economic and educational spheres.

These findings are in accord with the work of Cummins et al. (2007) in that, in spite of the pressure to uncritically implement "scientifically-proven" curricula, teachers still have choices and can use pedagogical techniques that imagine expanded notions of what it means to be literate. In this context, students have been shown to "articulate their realities and analyze social issues with strong and clear voices" (Cummins et al., 2007, p. v).

Although this study provides preliminary support for the efficacy of the program with Grade 8 students in a Canadian classroom, further study is needed before final conclusions on the positive effects of the program can be reached. There are two important considerations. First, it is not possible to know if the expressed attitudes toward the children of the global South would translate into improved actions toward intercultural co-existence. Education can have an important role in preparing students to contribute toward a democracy with equity of outcomes, but given that discriminatory attitudes are often built over generations, they are not likely to be dispelled by a one-year intervention. Second, although there were 23 students participating in the year-long program, due to time limitations, exit interviews were conducted with only 10 students. It is thus possible that those students who were not interviewed had a different set of views.

In conclusion, it remains to be seen to what extent a service-learning trip involving a transformative literacy project can be successfully implemented in other locations and with other populations. However, the nature of the Authors in the Classroom Program, as well as its Early Authors version, is that it focuses on children's own stories in their own language and provides much support and validation for expressing their voices. Such an approach suggests that this program might work well in many other cultural

and linguistic settings. It offers a means of broadening students' perceptions of persons in other countries, and encouraging unbiased views of other cultures.

Endnotes

1 In order to protect the identities of the participants, we do not provide specific details about the name and operations of the civil-society organization that ran the summer camp program.

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