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Building Partnerships in a Global Society: The Internationalization of Education Programs

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Abstract: This interactive session will explore the role of educators in a rapidly changing global society. The theoretical framework is based on a critical pedagogical approach. The focus is on discussing values, beliefs and assumptions, inherent power relationships and how these areas impact on the development of International educational partnerships.

Introduction

In our era of globalization, the transnational movement of people and the creation of international partnerships are transforming the world in which we live. In this increasingly connected world, education plays an important role in the development of a global society. It is critical that education be recognized as being not only about the development of an individual but that it is also about the development of a community. International educational partnerships can provide an informative and supportive opportunity to individuals, as well as organizations and communities from different countries, as they share their experiences, skills and expertise to the betterment of all. However, critical questions need to be addressed regarding values, beliefs and assumptions about the learner, inherent power relationships, and intercultural understandings.

Internationalization of Education Programs

Presently, we are teaching in education programs in the Caribbean that are part of international partnerships among governments, universities and schools. We are in the process of researching the bricolage of issues and concerns that must be considered from the local, national and international perspectives. It is our goal to create spaces within these developing global partnerships that foster sustainable communities of practice (Wenger, E., 2005) for lifelong learners. The purpose of this session is to reflect on the importance of the local context in which the learners are situated. We will explore the following issues: a) the role of educators in involving local stakeholders; b) the use of pedagogical approaches that respect learners from diverse backgrounds, as they learn to become empowered as lifelong learners (Freire, 1989) and c) how best to inform and support each other in our teaching practices.

Questions for Discussion

A) Our work with teachers and educators in the Caribbean, affects not only the learners in our classrooms, yet also their students, schools and communities. Reflexively, our foreign teaching experiences affect our teaching practices back home. These impacts can be negative or positive, yet are never neutral (Freire, 1989). To foster the development of sustainable learning communities we must continuously negotiate with local stakeholders regarding theories, practices and cultures, and to facilitate the positive and minimize the negative impacts. Seeking sustainability requires us to acquire a critical analysis of the understandings, obstacles and possibilities for sustainable learning communities within local contexts and cultures, connected through international educational partnerships.

B) In addressing the issues related to pedagogical approaches that respect learners from diverse backgrounds, Hargreaves (2003) stresses the need to “teach values, dispositions and senses of global responsibility that extend beyond the bounds of the knowledge economy” (p. 4). Exploring our teaching practices from a critical pedagogical lens encourages us to learn, relearn and unlearn. This approach helps us to gain an awareness of the societal influences in our lives and how this impacts on the teaching and learning process (Freire, 2006; Wink, 2005).

How do we begin to consider our openness to learn from other cultures? How can we ensure that innovative, collaborative partnerships develop that work toward the sustainability of communities of practice? How can we examine the extent to which our methods and understandings belong to the contextual contexts from which they were developed (Radovic, 2004)?

C) Finally, we wonder how we form partnership with our colleagues so that we can inform and support each other as we engage in the internationalization of education programs?

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