

February, 2014: Conference on Education for Democratic Citizenship held in Marrakesh, Morocco

Surprises:

1. Conference on Educating Youth for a Democratic Future –held in English
2. Raison d'être for the conference:
 - Democracy doesn't just happen after a regime change.
 - Especially where there is no tradition of democracy
 - It is important for citizens to learn democratic skills.
 - Delegates from Chile, and Argentina spoke to their personal experiences in their countries. Also in attendance: delegates from Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, the Netherlands, UK, Norway, Turkey, India, Haiti, USA, Canada.
3. Conference Sponsors:
 - Moroccan organizations and institutions
 - British Council
 - American Embassy, NGO from California, University in Missouri
 - Canada: University of Ottawa, and a French language board

Why were we there from Canada?

1. Educating Youth for Democratic Futures. Helping to explore the role of schooling in promoting democratic values in multicultural educational environments
2. Helping to explore educational systems which deal effectively with students from multicultural backgrounds. NB: for educational systems in most countries this is difficult ... there are extensive systemic problems ... even the curriculum documents are a problem
3. Toronto is the second most multicultural city in the world (UNDP, 2011).

Why was the University of Ottawa there?

1. To report on research carried out by the Faculty of Education, U of O, largely in Toronto elementary school classrooms
2. To report to Moroccan teachers on skills and practices Toronto teachers have developed and adopted, and how they have adapted their classrooms, the curriculum, and assessment procedures to meet the educational needs of multicultural students.

A brief summary of skills and practices discussed

Recognize that curriculum and assessment procedures of the majority culture may not be appropriate for the academic success of students from minority cultures. Be aware of minority students' learning and assessment patterns

Be aware of social, family, and cultural factors affecting academic achievement

Avoid identifying students as being different and likely to cause problems

Recognize there are multiple ways of perceiving reality

Feel able to cause change within the school to accommodate cultural differences

Be aware of students' experiences and use those experiences to develop learning activities

Be aware of the life of the students' community

When selecting appropriate text for evaluating literacy, pay particular attention to belief systems, and different family structures. Are descriptions accurate and respectful? Are different styles of life, traditions, and cultures valued?

Support literacy in the context of cultural diversity with an ethno cultural wall, a day or week focussing on each culture, family reading workshops, interactive homework.

Morag Gundy