# Professional Development for Active Learning in Sub-Saharan Africa: Reflectively Practicing a Community-Centered Approach

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*This article describes the activities, challenges, and participants' reflections of a teacher training program in Ethiopia. In response to the recent emphasis on more student-centered teaching approaches in the last decade, the training addressed ways to develop active learning methods and alternative assessments in settings where resources are scarce and class sizes are large. It also offered a chance for teachers to critically reflect on the effectiveness of many Western ideas and practices that are imported for development purposes. Key insights that emerged from reflection and discussion included (1) people learn more effectively when they actively use and discuss topics in practical and realistic ways; (2) students and teachers can benefit from performance-based assessments that show deep understandings of topic; and (3) traditional and community and home education practices must be considered when integrating new teaching methods.*

**Keywords**: *International Education, Educational Development, Community-Centered, Teacher Training, Active Learning*

## INTRODUCTION

On my third visit to Ethiopia I designed a weeklong conference on active learning methods for 60 teachers of grades one through ten. In order to understand the government's goals, teachers' needs, and contextual challenges in Ethiopia, I studied policy documents and observed classrooms on previous visits.

In 1994 the Ethiopian government created the *Education and Training Policy* (Ministry of Education, 1994), which contained numerous references and terms related to "student-centered" teaching, "problem-solving," and "active learning." These and similar terms have been promoted in order to replace "teacher-centered" instruction, an approach that involves the teacher talking most of the time, telling students what they need to know as they take notes and prepare to regurgitate the information on a quiz or test. Student-centered instruction, by contrast, places more responsibility for learning on the student, who engages in a variety of activities that allow for discussion and independent learning. I allotted time during the conference to reflect on how these two approaches, predominantly shaped by Western thought and research, fit into the current contexts of African schools and communities.

I also referred to a list of recommendations for reorienting teacher education and professional development that was generated by members of the UNESCO-sponsored International

Network of teacher-education institutions. Two important recommendations were: (3C.2) Demonstrate pedagogical techniques that foster higher-order thinking skills, support decision-making, involve participatory learning, and stimulate formulation of questions; and (3C.3) Emphasize to student teachers that citizenry in a sustainable community requires active participation and decision-making; challenge them to create ways to incorporate participation and decision making into their classroom procedure and curriculum (UNESCO, 2005). Given our wide range of teacher backgrounds, I set aside time to discuss teachers' understandings of key terms such as *higher-order thinking skills, participatory learning, sustainable community,* and *decision-making*.

In order to identify the challenges that teachers would face in implementing active learning methods, I observed classrooms and interviewed teachers on two previous visits to Ethiopia. My observations in six different schools and discussions with over 30 teachers revealed several challenges that shaped my planning and training processes.

The most obvious challenges were physical. Teachers and students lacked materials, including basic items such as paper, textbooks, pencils, and chalk. Most chalkboards were small, old, and scratched. Lab equipment, computers, and electricity were absent in most schools. Teachers taught in small rooms with 65 or more students, often three to a desk. Many students came to school hungry and sick. Given that many active learning methods require materials that most classrooms lacked, I had to choose and adapt ideas that required materials that were accessible to teachers and students.

Most teachers had not attended university and they had received very little professional development training beyond their own school experiences. Teachers also lacked extensive content area knowledge and what Lee Shulman (1987) calls *pedagogical content knowledge*, which is a teacher's deep understanding of how people learn a particular discipline. Moreover, many teachers had not grown up in the communities where they were teaching and thus lacked a keen awareness of cultural and social factors that influenced learning. For these reasons, I provided extra time in the early part of the conference to discuss (in active ways) pedagogical principles that were basic to active learning (see Figure 1).

Cross-cultural challenges also shaped the activities of the conference. I wondered how my Western ideas about learning and teaching would mix with their ideas. I questioned their receptivity to my training methods and wondered how they envisioned using the activities with their students. Even though I "knew" that it would be more effective for them to experience, use, talk about, and reflect on the methods that we would cover (Leu, 2004), I also knew that they had very different ideas of how classrooms and teacher trainings should run. Indeed, I often explained the rationale for playing the role of students and actually doing the activities before reflecting on them.

Finally, linguistic challenges played a role in the planning and ongoing dynamics of the training. Like many African nations, Ethiopia is home to many languages. The "official" language is Amharic, even though it is the native language of a non-majority group. More than 80 languages are spoken in the country. English is the language used in secondary schools, university classrooms, and on exams at these levels. English is one of the dominant languages—and therefore a requirement—for most jobs. Therefore, many students around the country whose mother tongue is not Amharic need to learn Amharic *and* English during the school years. They and their teachers in upper grades must become trilingual and even tricultural. Active learning is challenging because it tends to require large amounts of

academic communication, which can be overwhelming for students who whose mother tongue is not the language of instruction. (Then again, when well-designed, active learning methods can be effective ways to accelerate the learning of second and third languages.)

With the aforementioned goals and challenges in mind, I designed three conference modules based on the following areas of research typically associated with active learning: apprenticeship, constructivism, cooperation, cognition, performance-based assessment, and multiple modes of learning (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Mercer, 2000; Rogoff, 1990; Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). I also set aside sessions to hold reflective discussions to consider the effectiveness in African contexts of these "modern" ideas, which were largely generated by or filtered through Western thinking and research.


MODULE ONE

We began the first day with an overview of active learning, an approach that should be used in any language and in any grade. We previewed the conference objectives that we would experience, discuss, analyze, and adapt during the workshops. The poster of objectives included ideas for
- getting students to cooperate and talk more deeply about concepts in class
- getting students to actively read and write
- developing higher-order thinking skills and their academic language
- improving formative and summative assessment methods
- basing learning on community values and students' background knowledge
- making the learning of knowledge and skills practical
- improving curriculum and lesson planning to incorporate the above ideas

Our opening active learning activity was an interview grid, a table that teachers used to interview three or more colleagues as they walked around the room. The two questions were: What is active learning? and Why do we learn knowledge and skills? After ten minutes of very engaged discussion (mostly in Amharic), I asked for their answers which we put into a semantic map poster of active learning, shown in Figure 1. We added to this poster over time as new ideas emerged. This simple procedure showed the democratic and building aspects of learning.
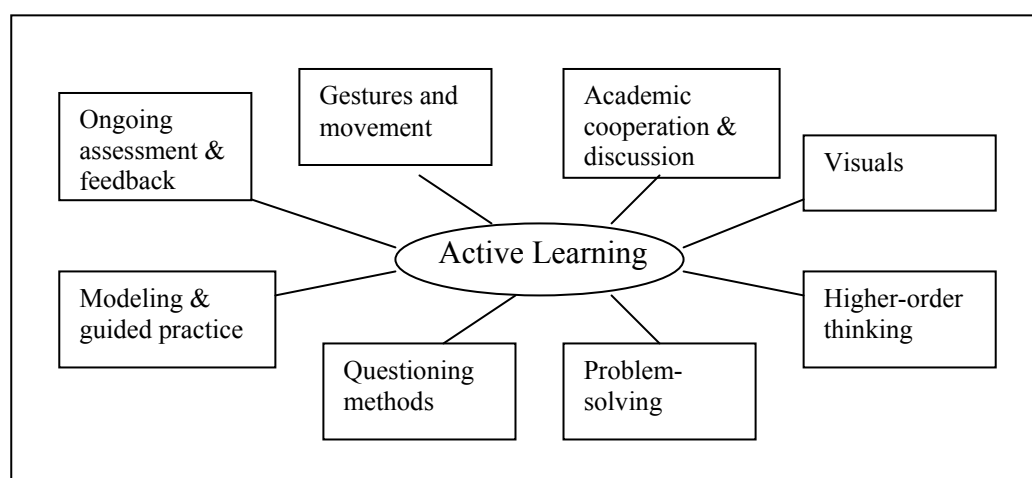


Figure 1. Semantic map poster of active learning features and strategies.

In the minds of many students, teachers, and administrators, the primary purpose for learning knowledge in school is to do well on tests. But groups pointed out that using knowledge in real world ways and using it to do well on tests are often very different. I asked several fact-based questions to teachers of different content areas (e.g., What is the derivative of x squared? What is a comet? Who fought in World War 1? What is irony?). To Amharic teachers I asked math questions. To science teachers I asked history questions. I also had them ask me basic questions on facts that I had learned in school. We all did poorly. All of us had learned these things in school, some even quite recently, yet very few could answer these basic questions of knowledge. But I argued that these facts did have a purpose in their day—to teach us to think. The knowledge learned in school helped us to use and develop the thinking skills that we still use today, even though much of the "original" knowledge is gone. We quickly came up with examples of how we still compare, synthesize, evaluate, persuade, infer causes and effects, interpret, and solve problems every day.

This discussion of thinking skills conveniently led into a discussion on the basic tenets of backward curriculum planning. Essentially, this type of planning consists of defining learning objectives (including cognitive skills and language), then designing appropriate assessments that show student learning of those objectives, then designing instruction that helps students do well on the assessments (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998).

After groups generated a list of essential ideas, concepts, and facts to be learned for a sample unit, they designed performance-based assessments that would motivate and demonstrate student learning. I showed teachers several models: a poster of the process of moving from agricultural communities to cities; an essay that compared two novels, a collage of shapes that formed a city; a story in a large format (for teaching literacy); and a lab report with a graph of data and interpretations. Teachers' "homework" that night was to design a performance-based assessment and a rubric for a topic that they commonly taught. Ideas that came back the next day included the following: designing a school, creating a science book for younger students, writing a drama about the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, and composing a song about hygiene.

I also showed rubrics with criteria that students needed to meet in order to succeed. Using rubrics and other lists of criteria for student evidence of learning was new to many teachers who had been accustomed to assessing only with points and tests. We discussed how a test can give a rough measure of content knowledge and facts, but it tells us little about how well a student can *use* the knowledge and facts in ways that are valued in society. To complicate matters, tests in upper grades in Ethiopia are in English, which end up evaluating a student's knowledge of English as much or more than his or her comprehension of content. For example, a student may do very well on a science test given in Amharic, but do poorly when the same questions are asked in English.

I often used examples from participants' classrooms and communities. This modeled the process of connecting new learning to students' existing knowledge and skills. To do this, teachers must find out what students already know and can do. This is especially necessary in the beginning of a school year in order to know what students need and do not need. We then brainstormed ways to observe, assess, and evaluate students' existing knowledge and skills the first month of school. Suggestions included: writing a biographical incident essay, writing a letter to a parent, drawing a diagram of the water cycle, answering questions in pairs, doing a short quiz on fractions, reading a story aloud and retell it, talking to last year's teachers, and looking at student work from the previous year.

Being in a class-like setting brought up another dimension of reflection for the rest of the week: teachers had to take on the perspective of their students during the activities, while concurrently thinking as teachers who would adapt and use the activities.


## MODULE TWO


We started Module Two with the question, What is language and how does it play a role in modern education? One teacher pointed out that without language, very little happens in school—or anywhere else. Language is a two-way process, and with the prevalent "chalk and talk" teacher-centered lecture methods used across the country (and world), students get very little opportunity to talk. I mentioned research that argued that producing novel messages, especially ones that have some interest or emotion attached to them, develops language and thinking that "sticks" much better than just listening or just parroting back expected answers (Mercer, 2000; Swain, 2000).


### Quality of Questions


In many lessons in Ethiopia and the rest of the world, classroom talk is prompted by teacher questions. Therefore, I posed my own questions about questioning as we teach: What makes a question good? Are there alternatives to using questions? After discussing these prompts in pairs, several teachers said that questions should do three things: require students to think, require longer answers, and be relevant and interesting. One teacher said, "I guess I should ask questions that I myself would be interested in answering."

Adapting Ciardello's (1998) classification system of questions, we sketched up three levels of questions that I called: surface-level, which are short answer and fact-based questions; under-the-surface questions which require longer answers and more thinking; and life-application questions that apply to student lives and the world around us. For example, Who invaded Ethiopia in 1936? is a surface question; Why did they invade? is an under-surface question; and What influence from them is still evident today in cultural and political arenas? is a life-application question. Teachers then generated their own questions and categorized them at their tables. A conclusion from one teacher: "We need to use all three levels at different times—I think I have been using too many that are just on the surface. I need to remember to go deeper."

When I put up the quotation, "The most important questions are your own," we discussed how we must train students to ask their own questions, especially those that are under-the-surface and life-application. We can do this by modeling good questions for students, by encouraging them to write questions in their daily journals, and by putting student questions up on the wall that generate topics for discussion or writing.

In many classrooms in Ethiopia, teachers tend to use questions to which they already know the answer. Many students (often the same ones each day) raise their hands, one student is called on to respond to the question, the teacher evaluates the answer and either praises or corrects it. The other 59 students sit there and listen to the whole process. I pointed out this "initiation, response, evaluation" (IRE) pattern (Mehan, 1979) and encouraged everyone to try to develop alternative types of classroom interactions that would get students to think more and talk more every day.

A question-based activity that accomplished these goals was Numbered Heads Together (Kagan, 1992), in which a question is posed to groups of four students, each one with a number (1-4). Each group discussed their answers, synthesized the various responses, and made sure that each member could clearly respond when asked by the teacher. After several minutes of discussion time, I pointed to a group and called out "This group, number three!" and person number 3 in that group had to answer. Others could offer assistance. Teachers appreciated the low-preparation, high cooperation nature of the activity.

I then asked the group, "Is so much questioning necessary?" Questions, especially teacher and test questions, aren't the only way to get learning going, nor are they the only way to show learning. Active learning tends to thrive on more student-driven and performance-based activities, students answering their own questions, working together, and solving real-world-like problems (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). One teacher remarked: "One good question [especially if we can get students to generate it] can outweigh 10 mediocre questions."

## Authentic Communication with Information Gaps

Authentic communication between students fosters democratic processes as it builds language and content knowledge (Mercer, 2000). Unlike IRE, bridging an information gap happens when someone who has information communicates it to someone who wants or needs it. This gap can result from one's interest or it can be a need to solve a problem or create a product of some sort. Listening to directions that you haven't heard before is one example, while asking students to say the name of the capital of Ethiopia is not authentic because the asker already knows the answer.

One common and effective information gap activity that we used every day was a Think-Pair-Share, in which two people are given a brief time to think about a topic or question before talking to one another in pairs. Students then shared with the whole class what their partner said or a synthesis of the discussion, forcing them to both listen and to think. Despite its apparent simplicity, and despite its "well known-ness" by many teachers with whom I have worked, few classrooms have high quality pair discussions. This is largely due to the lack of knowledge of what constitutes a good conversation and the lack of modeling by teachers and well-supported practice activities during class. Therefore, we generated (for self-assessment templates and posters) several list-worthy criteria and qualities of good conversations: two face each other and have good eye contact; do not interrupt; ask probing questions; encourage; appropriately disagree; stay on topic; build off the partner's ideas; use evidence for claims; and take turns. Other variations of Think-Pair-Share that we practiced were TWPS (think, write, pair, share), TPS2P (use two prompts, one for each student in the pair), and TPS-No-Look (one student can see the notes and the other one cannot).

A popular information gap activity was called the Line Activity, in which half of the teachers turned around to face teachers behind them (I also showed how they could get up into two long lines that faced one another). The talkers could see me and the listeners faced away from me, listening to their partners describe the poster that I showed of the malaria cycle. I asked the group facing me to describe what they saw to their partners. I then switched sides. On the way, however, I added several vocabulary words to the poster so that the second group would add to the vocabulary of the discussion. These words were: *parasite, multiply, infect, inject, rupture, female Anopheles, mature, released*, and *circulate*. Teachers later said that discussing the topic twice and having the added words helped them to remember the new terms.

Another authentic communication group activity was the use of Expert Groups (also called jigsaw groups in the literature). Normally, in Expert Groups each group reads a different piece of text, discusses it enough to become "experts," and then shares it with a different set of students who haven't read it. The information gap is often wide. Students typically need to fill in a chart or worksheet with the different experts' contributions. We varied this activity by using two different science lab variations, one in which the height of a ramp was changed and the other in which the diameter of the wheel was changed. Half of the groups did one and half did the other so that in the end they could share their results with a group that did a different experiment. I showed a large model of a graph and put up signs with different academic language of scientific inquiry on them, such as *observe, hypothesize, dependent variable, independent variable, graph the data, interpret,* and *extrapolate.* I told teachers to use these terms as much as possible as they worked and shared. Teachers then performed the experiments and wrote up the data. Finally, they got together with a different group to share what they had learned. Finally, a basic formative assessment was to used their graphs to extrapolate a condition (such as a height of three meters) that they could not do.

Active Reading

Students often need a pre-reading activity to prepare them for difficult texts. We practiced a Quotation Café to "warm up" our brains for reading, build background knowledge, and cultivate interest in the topic of a text. On the overhead I put just the title and picture of an article on tigers that were causing the evacuation of people from a forest in India. I then handed out eight different quotations from the article to all 60 teachers and had them talk to four other people in order to guess the content of the article. Each time a teacher talked to a new person who read the quotation and discussed a hypothesis, knowledge was constructed and predictions improved. The quotations also contained key vocabulary that I presented with visuals and hand motions before reading.

After reading the article, teachers did a Perspective Interview Triad, which is a simple drama that requires participants to stand in the shoes of something or someone from the text and be interviewed by others. After choosing roles, they can look back at the text. In our case, the three roles were a tiger, a person who was being forced to evacuate the forest, and a wildlife conservationist. When it was the tiger's turn to respond, for example, the other two asked questions such as, "How do you feel? What do you eat?" Along with the creativity and spontaneity involved, teachers mentioned that the activity developed thinking skills of empathy, synthesis, and persuasion.

We then proceeded to break down reading comprehension into a set of interlocking strategies. This analysis of a complex skill (reading) was new for most teachers. Yet, when asked to respond to the question, "How do good readers think when they read?" their discussions yielded many key strategies: asking questions, predicting, inferring, figuring out words, summarizing, figuring out the main idea and author's purpose, and connecting to background knowledge. I then modeled the process of reading aloud and thinking aloud (RATA) in order to show teachers how they can—and must—make their thinking visible to students and show them that considerable thinking happens while reading—that it is a very active process that involves much more than sounding out the words and waiting for comprehension to magically happen. Through the RATA process, teachers can model the ways in which content area experts think about their discipline. Conference participants practiced RATA with a partner on a text in their discipline.

While reading aloud, a very active strategy for teaching vocabulary is the use of gestures and movement. I modeled this with several words that I encountered. For example, for the word *threaten*, I put my fists up and chest out and lunged toward the teachers near me. A powerful strategy is to have students come up with their own gestures for words. I gave half of the teacher pairs two words and the other half two words (*barred, perish, vanish, quarrel*). Each pair created gestures for the two words and taught these to a teacher pair with different words. An activity that was fun for me and funny to them was when they came up with gestures to teach me Amharic words for *stop, look for*, and *laugh*. I also amused them with my ongoing use of Amharic transition words *bihonim* (however) and *selasi* (therefore), for which I used hand motions as well. Finally, we also discussed ways to teach words such as *plight* and *tradition* that are difficult to teach with movements.

The final reading activity for this module was a combination of Reciprocal Teaching (Palinscar and Brown, 1984) and Expert Groups. I told our group that I had seen many teachers around the world simply tell students to get in groups or pairs and "discuss the text." Yet this often failed because students need more direction, modeling, and practice to effectively discuss. Using the strategies modeled by RATA, groups of students could then read and more specifically discuss texts. Teachers formed groups, read a text, and stopped at times to ask each other questions that focused on summarizing, predicting, questioning, clarifying word meanings for several different texts. I gave different texts to different groups and then had each group share their main points with a group that had a different section of the text. One sixth grade teacher said, "Ara (Wow!), that was much more interesting than just summarizing the text. We really got deep into it. Then we got to teach it to others. I think my students can do this, too."

## MODULE THREE

In many classrooms in Ethiopia, students spend much time copying and taking notes, which tend to be loosely connected terms that they passively take in for testing purposes. They get little opportunity to create new language patterns in writing in order to describe their own thoughts in their own sentences. When students do write, a typical teacher has little time to properly comment and support them because of large class sizes.

We began with a pre-writing visual organizer for persuasive writing, called a Balance Scale (Figure 2). I had teachers pick a two-sided issue at their tables and discuss how they would fill in the organizer's blank spaces for: background information, reasons and evidence that supported their thesis, opposing reasons with evidence, and responses to opposing points. They also had to evaluate the influence, or weight, of the points on each side and put them in the appropriately-sized box. This was a scaffold, a temporary support structure (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), that teachers could use to help students generate ideas and organize them into effective persuasive essays.
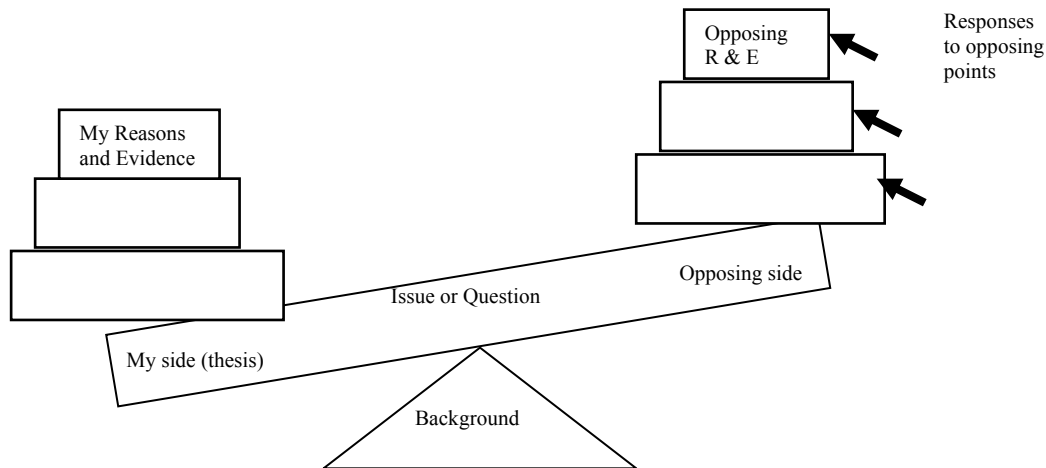
Figure 2. Balance scale visual organizer for persuasive writing.

One teacher said, "This is great—it almost makes me want to write." I responded by saying that we teachers must write and we must write a lot. We must model all stages of our writing for students and what we are thinking during the process. A teacher shouted, "like WATA," an acronym he had coined for Write Aloud-Think Aloud. I then modeled how to share my thoughts during writing as I wrote the first paragraph of a persuasive essay up on the overhead.

## Teaching Students

Around mid-morning the school director brought in 90 students with whom teachers could practice the new active teaching strategies. Three groups of second, fifth, and eighth graders volunteered to be taught by the teachers with the new activities and methods that they had experienced and discussed. One administrator asked why we would take the time and energy to coordinate so many students. I had observed in other workshops that seeing and doing an activity as students—even teaching other teachers—were not enough. Teachers needed to see it work with real students; they had to experience the fun and challenges of teaching them and adjusting in real time as students learn and struggle to learn.

Teachers quickly and efficiently designed learning activities based on ideas from the conference. Approximately half the teachers were able to teach a 10 to 15-minute activity with students who were closest to the level that they taught. Several standout activities emerged: an information gap activity in which pairs of students had to describe a story that the teacher acted out (one student in each pair could not see the teacher); a problem-soling activity in which students designed a useful building with five geometric shapes and then calculated how much paint was needed; a language lesson that taught students Oromifa (the majority language in Ethiopia) words for body parts and actions; and a song for the fifth grade class called the Life Cycle of a House Fly (translated from Amharic), for which the music teacher provided an assortment of instruments and helped with the singing. The song contains several academic terms that teachers reuse and expand.

*A housefly is a harmful insect*
*It loves dirt and carries germs on it*
*It infects our foods with bacteria*

*Its life cycle has four stages*
*First the egg then the larva*
*Then the pupa and finally an adult*

I quickly noticed that these activities were community-focused and practical. The information gap story was about a community well, the building that students designed was a community center, the Oromifa actions focused on work around the home and community, and the song taught practical information for improving health.

## Student Reactions

One fifth grade student said, "I liked these methods because I could not only learn from the teacher, but other students, too. It was fun. I will go home and teach my little brother some of these things." Another student said, "That was actually fun. Thanks!" to a teacher on his way out the door. Other students said similar things to teachers, who later commented that they had rarely seen that much interest or energy on the part of their students before.
Other student comments included

- We remember the information better because we did something.
- We feel much more comfortable and feel that the teacher is on our side.
- I am happy because I talked a lot.
- I want more teaching like this.
- I liked the hand movements. I will remember them much better than just looking at the words.

And yet, some students were not sure how to react and some were not on task. We had a brief discussion on classroom management, which can get more challenging as we offer students more choice, chances to talk, and control over their learning experiences. But, as one teacher commented, "I think the learning is worth the extra management efforts on our part." We also concluded that students would need time to adjust to new ways of learning, new habits, etc. One teacher mentioned that schools could choose a few strategies and use them across grade levels and subject areas.

## Teacher Habits of Reflective Practice

Midway through the week we discussed reflection and its importance in teaching. Rather than just being distributor of knowledge, we concluded that a teacher plays a key role in shaping future members of local and global communities. This complex role requires habits of reflective practice, which means being a researcher in one's own classroom, school, and community. Reflection begins with keen observation of the process of students and teachers working together. We decided to create a list to help guide observations and reflections on the last day of the conference and the following year. After much discussion, teachers generated the following points to help spark and guide reflection.

- Connect to student background knowledge
- Integrate community values into instruction and assessment
- Increase the quantity and quality of talking between students; Have students teach others and authentically communicate
- Model and support expert thinking, reading, and writing by thinking aloud

- Use various ways to check understanding (formative assessment)
- Have students move/act/mime/sing
- Post and use visuals on the walls
- Have students do something practical and useful with knowledge and skills that they learn

Teachers then used this list on the last day of the conference as they prepared their activities, observed fellow teachers, and reflected on their own teaching.

<div align="center">Follow-up and Sustainability</div>

Discussing reflections led us to talk about ways to adapt the new practices for use the following year. One suggestion was to have a dedicated professional developer at each school. Another idea was to provide a stipend for a content area staff developer for each discipline. Another, less costly alternative was to hold weekly department meetings that focused a part of the time on analyzing student work and another part on improving instruction. Some teachers wanted to figure out ways to share ideas across schools, both private and government, in the same geographical area. One group agreed to gather ideas in a portfolio (with samples of student work) during the year and prepare to share them at our next conference the following summer and at other local professional development gatherings.

A key sociocultural point emerged during our discussion on sustainability. One group mentioned that the "student-centered" approach, popular in much of the Western research literature, may place too much emphasis on the individual. This emphasis, according to several teachers, tends to clash with Ethiopian traditional values of learning to become an effective member of a community. In many parts of Africa, particularly rural areas, the purpose of education is preparing students for improving community life (Tedla, 1996), not to become a socially-competitive and self-sufficient individual. Indeed, many students in sub-Saharan Africa come from communities and home settings that drastically differ from the culture and procedures of "modern" classrooms. Teachers concluded that as they design learning experiences, they must keep such backgrounds in mind, remembering that home and community life form a powerful foundation for current and future education.

Some teachers argued that a more "community-centered" teaching approach was needed. Their table group drafted a follow-up checklist for schools to consider as they improve their instructional and assessment practices in culturally appropriate ways. Many of these goals, they pointed out, were aligned with community-based values. They planned to share this list with administrators when they returned and incorporate it into evaluations and curriculum development meetings. A few of the items included:

- developing active participation in community issues
- valuing the history, culture, and practices of the community
- developing character and respect
- building communication skills

I suggested that a group of teachers at each school meet regularly to discuss how active learning and community-centered ideas were being integrated into teaching and assessment. Teachers might also analyze student writings at these meetings. One teacher could take notes and then meet with the director to describe successes and needs. I also recommended that

teachers model strategies with the entire staff on a monthly basis, perhaps at the beginning of a staff meeting. One teacher responded by pointing out that by being a model of an effective community that shares and supports one another, teachers could provide additional teaching that serves students and their communities.


REFLECTIONS


On the first day many teachers arrived expecting to sit back and take notes for a week. To them, this was what education looked like. They had been taught for many years this way and this is the teaching that I observed in their classrooms. It was a challenge to model a very different approach in such a short amount of time and in a language that many found difficult to understand. However, on the last day they told me that they had learned more and enjoyed learning more because they were talking with others and not just listening to me. I believe that the successful activities (interview grids, expert groups, information gap activities, and think-pair-shares) were effective because of the extra thinking generated by social interaction and the process of building a community of learners.

The discussion of community-centered curriculum development and teaching pointed out to me that many aspects of Western education are competitive and focused on the individual. Even many "active learning" approaches, when I examined them more closely, tended to be focused on the advancement and achievement of individuals and small groups rather than on the benefit of a community. Therefore, when considering ideas from abroad, indigenous educators should seek to choose and adapt ideas with local community values and practices in mind. Eighty percent of the students in Ethiopia, for example, come from rural settings and small communities, yet most of the teachers, materials, and teaching methods are designed for and in urban contexts.

As a Westerner I was challenged daily to give a rationale for the new practices that we were using, and during the week I slowly realized the many challenges of integrating them into an African context. While the need for more non-teacher-centered methods was apparent, discussions with teachers helped me see that importing yet another set of non-African tools is not be the answer. An approach that synthesizes research and ideas from Africa and around the world, coupled with a spirit of creating pedagogy that meets Africa's unique and varying communities, is needed. Teachers therefore agreed to (1) adapt conference ideas to fit their settings and students, keeping home learning practices and community values in mind; and (2) design new activities with active learning principles in mind such as modeling, scaffolding, practicality, authentic communication, and performance-based assessment. In this way, teachers not only prepare their students more effectively, but they become proud owners of their practices.

In conclusion, this conference was just a small step in the long journey of becoming more effective and reflective teachers. During this conference we learned the importance of looking through the lenses of community and communication, two important dimensions of human development in Africa that can clash with many Western notions of education and achievement. Teachers are on the front lines of these clashes and must therefore be prepared to reflect on how to best equip future leaders, workers, and world citizens. It is my hope that these dedicated teachers will continue to reflect on what effective teaching entails *in their settings* and in Africa so that they can join in the creation of empowering curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Images of the conference are available at www.jeffzwiers.com/addisconference

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