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NAOS case study

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NAOS: Intellectual Output (O5) case studies

Countries face challenges in catering for the diverse needs of migrant students and narrowing the gaps in education outcomes between native students and immigrant students. (Inter)national evidence (OECD 2010 Reviews of Migrant Education) suggest that strategies to raise education outcomes for migrant students need to focus on school level and system level, such as:

- preparing school leaders and teachers to meet the needs of diverse student groups;
- increasing student opportunity to learn language (mother tongue as well as language of instruction) in regular school lessons;
- encouraging schools to build capacity in the area of dealing with diversity;
- making collaboration between school and community more effective.

The central topic in NAOS is professional capacity concerning dealing with diversity related to migration (in all its different forms). Professional capacity includes innovative forms of cooperation between educational professionals and other professionals dealing with children.

NAOS is complementary to the SIRIUS policy network carried out from 2012 - 2014. SIRIUS has promoted and enhanced knowledge transfer among stakeholders in order to improve the education of children and youngsters from migrant background. One of the focal points in SIRIUS was professional capacity. The difference between the SIRIUS activities in this area and the NAOS activities concern the specific focus on pre- and in-service modules for professional development as well as the inclusion of schools in the network.

One of the activities is running casestudies (Intellectual Output O5) in three different non-NAOS countries with a focus on an inspiring approach, method or pedagogical act in teaching inclusion dealing with diversity.

This report reflects findings of a case study held in Latvia at the Teaching History of Culture and Cultural Studies, Riga Teika Secondary School¹

Latvia

Description of the teacher's approach

The case study addresses the teaching practices of a teacher of History of Culture and Cultural Studies in upper secondary school in the district of Teika in Riga, Latvia. The teacher's name is Liene Jurgelāne. The case refers to academic years 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 (when she worked in this school).

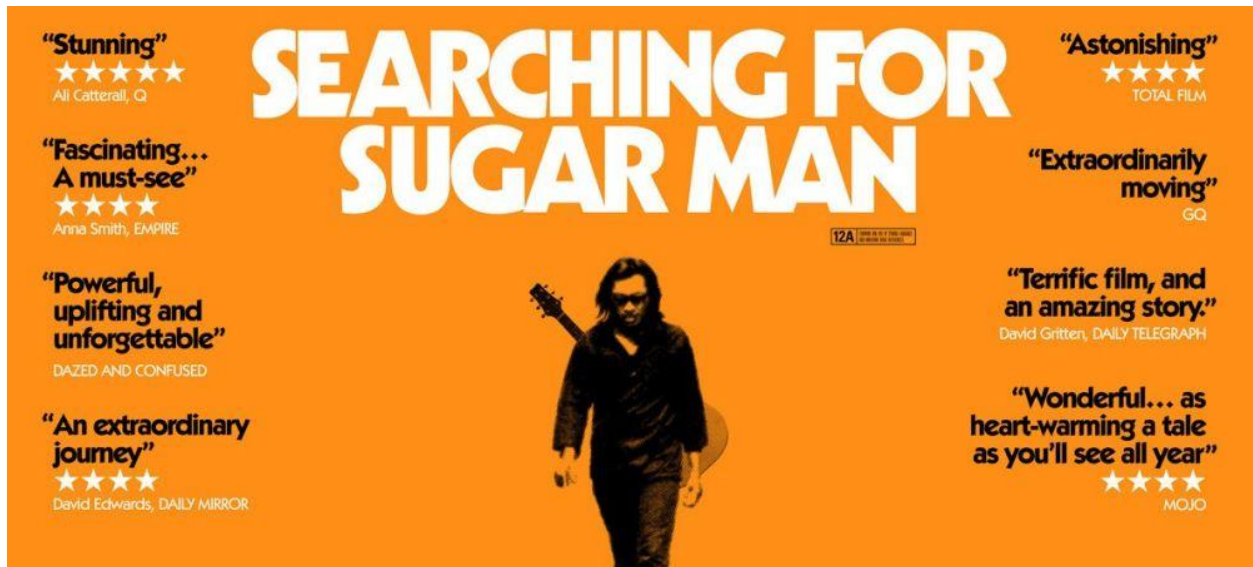
The teacher's professional background: Liene Jurgelāne graduated from the Latvian Academy of Culture in 2005 and went on to work in Ocho Museum in Namibia in 2006 (through GLEN Global Learning Programme in the Global South). On return to Riga, Latvia she took part in several arts and culture projects, e.g. organised an exhibition about urban myths. Liene joined the Mission Possible programme (the Latvian member organisation of Teach for All <http://teachforall.org/en>) in 2008 and in that capacity taught for two years in Teika Secondary School.

Materials used for the case study include interviews with the teacher and with two former students, class plans, and background information about Mission Possible as a pedagogical project.

The use of popular culture to teach about social justice and cultural awareness

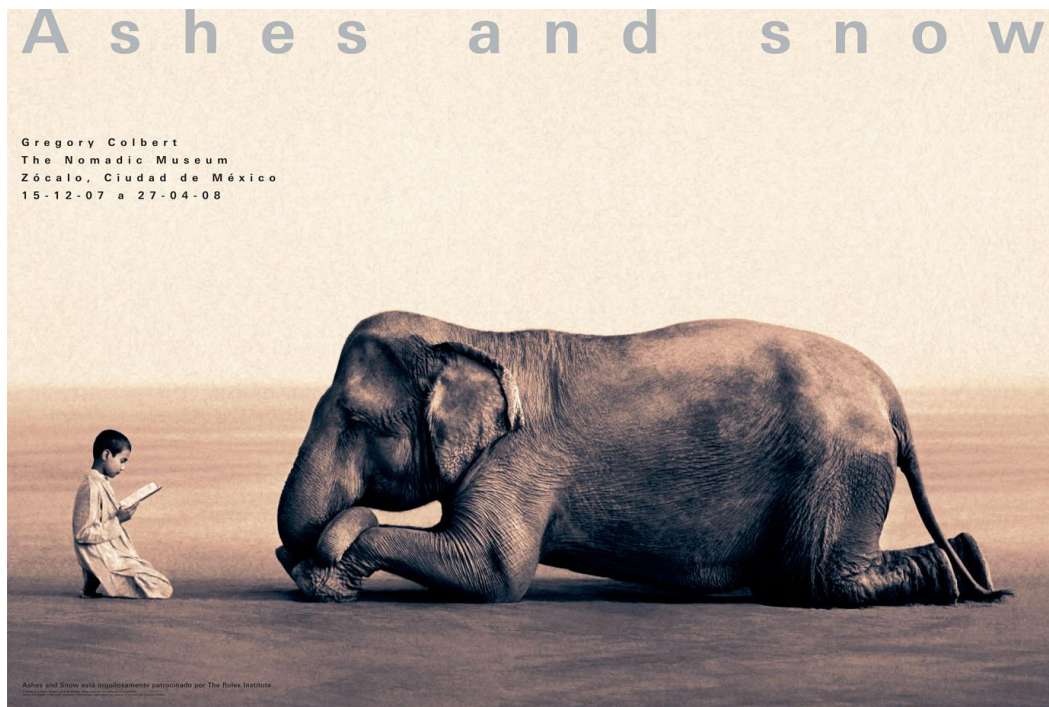
Liene Jurgelāne used a vast repertory of music and films, and some visual art (not only from popular culture, also art films) to treat topics related to the themes of social justice, cultural awareness and globalisation. Cultural awareness was the main goal of Liene's teaching, but the themes of social justice, relationship between humanity and the environment, and globalisation were also covered. Most of these materials (but not all) were linked to popular music trends and subcultures of the Twentieth century.

¹ This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Examples:

- The film 'Searching for Sugar Man' (Malik Bendjelloul, 2012) was used to address the topics of modern popular culture and social context, but also to reflect on the apartheid;
- Bob Dylan's song 'The Times they are a changin'' was used to discuss social themes in youth movements and youth culture of the 1950s and 60s;
- Art film from Gregory Colbert's project Ashes and Snow was used to discuss the shortcomings of the anthropocentric view of the world, and people's relations with animal world and the planet.



Liene describes her rationale for using popular culture through the following points:

- 'Modern culture is a language young people understand'. According to interviews, the previous teacher of History of Culture and Cultural Studies in the Teika school has used a more traditional approach (lectures, individual written homework) and has not attempted to improve students' motivation by helping them to identify with trends and cultural phenomena they studied. Liene Jurgelāne emphasised the immediate experience of contemporary culture and used the repertoires of modern high culture and popular culture to evoke students' reactions.
- By demonstrating to students that much of what is perceived as entertainment carries information about culture, represents reactions to cultural and social values, and (re)shapes society as a result, the teacher increased students' interest in culture. According to her, the goal was to demonstrate 'that culture is not static, not frozen.'

The teacher's choice of elements of modern culture to use in class was based on:

- Relevance to the curriculum. In Latvia, the classes have to fit into the framework curriculum set by the Ministry of Education and Science, in this case – the curricula for History of Culture and Cultural Studies. The choice of methods, however, is up to the teacher.
- Choosing the materials, which, in her opinion, could better help students to internalise new notions;
- Cultural diversity – she made a point of covering not just mainstream popular culture and of using not only US-made films and music, but also to address issues related to diversity in the global context.

Treating diversity

While Liene describes her students from the period as mostly culturally homogenous (Latvian), she notes that there was a diversity of social backgrounds represented in class, as virtually in every school in Riga. Her focus, however, was on diversity in the outside world – and the dynamic of cultural interaction that globalisation brings.

In discussions treating the 2012 documentary 'Searching for Sugar Man', telling the story of a 1970s Detroit musician, forgotten in the US but hugely popular among his generation in South Africa, Liene invited her students to reflect on the interplay of diversity, racial politics (apartheid) and cultural consumption. As a review of the film points out, 'Being Mexican, he (the film's protagonist, Sixto Rodriguez – M.G.) escaped the white/black divide: liberal South African white music-lovers could embrace him more easily.'² The in-class discussions and assignments related to the film also helped students to make sense of globalisation as a cultural process,

² The Guardian (2012), Searching for Sugar Man, review. 26 July 2012.
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/jul/26/searching-for-sugar-man-review>

bringing together people in different cultural and social settings through a flow and exchange of ideas and art forms.

The Cultural Studies course went beyond addressing human/ cultural diversity by addressing the diversity of ways in which people in different places of the planet interact with animal world. This was done through watching and discussing 'Ashes and Snow' by Gregory Colbert who has launched more than 60 expeditions to locations including India, Burma, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Dominica, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tonga, Namibia, and Antarctica to film and photograph interactions between human beings and animals. The goal of bringing this material into the classroom, according to Liene, was to help students acquire a less anthropocentric view of the world.

Teaching methods:

Liene Jurgelāne's approach to teaching cultural awareness emphasised interactive teaching methods involving peer teaching and peer learning, problem-solving and group work.

- The teacher never used lectures, instead she familiarised students with the material (e.g. films, music), presented main theoretical points through PowerPoint presentations and gave students groupwork assignments based on those;
- The teacher gave the class many analytical, problem-solving assignments individually and in groups (e.g. text analysis);
- Peer teaching and learning was often used to introduce different sub-topics (e.g. a student would get an assignment to familiarise herself/ himself with a particular trend in modern art or culture and would then have to teach a small group of students about this phenomenon).
- The teacher used simulation games (e.g. a game about communication between two cultures, a variation of 'The Derrians' <http://www.nonformality.org/wp-content/uploads/2006/03/derrians.pdf>)

In order to achieve the goals of her classes and to make sure that students acquire the knowledge and skill required by the syllabus, the teacher established a rapport with her students, based on a clear set of rules and informal manner of communication, which elicited trust. According to a former student, the teacher 'always treated us like equals, but that does not mean you could chat and ignore what's going on in her classes'. Another student noted: 'There always was a natural respect for the teacher. No cheating, because after 2 warnings she would cancel the test work. No loud noises or chatting in her classes, because it was interesting and everybody was engaged.' At the same time, informal communication was encouraged, the teacher shared the music tracks that she listened to, and supported informal socialising with the students.

Strict but transparent rules combined with an informal manner of communication were a novelty for the students, since school culture in Latvia is as a rule more formal but also less effective as far as abiding by the rules is concerned.

Results

The main impact of Liene Jurgelānes's approach to teaching cultural awareness has been, not surprisingly, greater cultural awareness among students. As one of them said in the interview for this case study, 'I began to understand art and culture in a deeper sense, the connection to real-life context, the trends in society.' The most telling student reaction has to do with the role of individuals as agents of culture: 'Before that, culture was for me an external phenomenon, it was somewhere out there. Through Liene's classes, I understood that we are using and creating culture in our daily life, that I am part of culture and how it changes.'

Another aspect of the impact concerns a more complex understanding of globalisation. As one student pointed out, 'We discussed globalisation, and the way it manifests itself through the blending of cultures, through borrowings across cultures. For instance, in India the popularity of American fast food is combined with transforming this food according to the local tastes, the local cuisine. Some people believe globalisation degrades culture, but I do not think so. New cultural forms are developed this way.'

Making the link between high culture, social context and everyday popular culture more obvious, e.g. through listening to popular musicians such as Bob Dylan, has been another conscious goal of the teacher, and it appears that the students have internalised this understanding of culture.

According to Liene, the classes empowered students to feel at home in the domain of 'culture'. At any rate, the courses she taught, 'History of Culture' and 'Cultural Studies', have had a motivating effect on students to engage themselves with the notions and practice of culture. Some students who initially said they had no interest in culture, later entered the Latvian Academy of Culture (a higher education institution for creative professions and art managers).

Transferability

The core elements of Liene's approach to teaching cultural awareness – the use of modern culture, the mix of 'high culture' and 'popular culture' materials and the emphasis on peer teaching and other interactive methods – have a great transferability potential. However, interviews with her students suggest that personal qualities, such as the ability to establish new ground rules, to strike an informal conversation with the students, etc., have played a large role in the success of her classes. One former student even used the word 'charisma' in the interview. While personal qualities of teachers matter, and many government-run and private schemes to recruit teachers emphasise personal qualities³, the problem of replicating or transferring approaches based on personal qualities remains.

This is an appropriate moment to discuss the approach and the impact of the teachers' recruitment scheme Mission Possible based on the Teach For All network philosophy, which concerns a specific understanding of leadership in schools.

³ See e.g. 'Personal qualities', Teach in Scotland campaign website, <http://www.teachinScotland.org/doihavewhatittakes/personalqualities/index.asp>

Professional requirements

Liene Jurgelāne taught her classes as a participant in Mission Possible teaching scheme in Latvia, part of the Teach For All network. The programme recruits successful graduates of higher education institutions and upgrades their leadership skills, then places them in schools for two years. As can be seen from the visual ads of the Latvian programme, the emphasis is on the young teachers as charismatic leaders.



Laiks tavām zināšanām doties misijā

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The Teach For All approach to personal qualities of the temporary teachers they place in schools is formulated in its theory of change as 'Recruiting and selecting... the country's most promising future leaders of all academic disciplines and career interests who demonstrate the core competencies to positively impact student achievement... Training and developing participants so they build the skills, mindsets, and knowledge needed to maximize impact on student achievement'. The emphasis is therefore on the personality of the prospective teacher (leadership) and on intensive in-service training to maximise impact, rather than on a long-term commitment to teaching career.

While some of the alumni of Mission Possible stay on in the teaching profession after their placement in a school ends, the programme essentially views the teaching experience as a form of volunteering which should have a transformative effect on schools. Nevertheless, Teach For All claims that approximately 50% - 70% of their alumni stay on in schools as career teachers.⁴

The approach has both positive and negative sides. The Teach For All founding organisation, Teach For America, which started as early as 1989, has received the most criticism over the negative message it sent to lifetime career teachers and the impact it had on underprivileged communities: as one critic wrote in 2013, it 'forces a corporatized, data-driven culture upon

⁴ The Economist (2015) "High-fliers in the classroom". 14 February 2015. Retrieved 18 April 2016

unique low-income communities with unique dynamics and unique challenges'.⁵ Teach For All, however, has changed its recruitment and training methods considerably since the early days of Teach for America, and the Latvian organisation, Mission Possible (Iespējama Misija) has for years put an emphasis also on raising professional standards for career teachers and especially for school principals.⁶

The positive impact of Mission Possible approach, in the case of Liene Jurgelāne, can be seen in selecting a teacher with a high level of knowledge and skills regarding world cultures and a strong leadership-oriented personality, and equipping her with effective interactive teaching methods. Without possessing a teaching qualification, Liene delivered diverse, well thought-through courses based on the curriculum, met the learning needs of her students and inspired a new level of cultural awareness in them. The negative side of her being a Mission Possible teacher has been the short-term engagement with teaching, which did not allow, for example, for continuous transfer of her skills and approaches to other teachers in the same school. It would still be wrong, however, to discount her contribution or her approach as insignificant on the basis of her not being in a lifelong teaching career.

Discussion: Success factors

Teaching cultural awareness is different from teaching 'about' culture. According to Tomalin and Stempleski, who offer a comprehensive, if still related to language pedagogy, interpretation of teaching cultural awareness, the term has at least three aspects: awareness of one's own culturally-induced behaviour, awareness of the culturally induced behaviour of others, and ability to explain one's own cultural standpoint.⁷ This explanation, however, does not offer an exhaustive interpretation of 'culture'. The 'culture' of which Liene Jurgelāne wished her students to become aware is not so much a traditional, ethnic or local culture, but rather an international culture that channels the ideas and aesthetic forms articulated through high culture into the everyday culture and back. Her focus, as she herself has pointed out, has been on demonstrating 'that culture is not static, not frozen', and on achieving the understanding of the role that culture plays in individuals' lives and the impact that individuals have on culture.

The impact of on students' understanding regarding the linkages between cultural awareness and social justice in the global context could have been greater, if it were not for the specific framework of interpreting culture, imposed by the Latvian curriculum. The curriculum for History of Culture and Cultural Studies (in Latvian – *Kultūroloģija*) is based primarily on the German theories of culture, including the interpretation of culture in German phenomenology.⁸

The impact of the curriculum can be seen, for example, in the choice of the authors of teaching aids for Cultural Studies to focus not so much on the social or political aspects of culture as on

⁵ Catherine Michna, quoted in Dana Goldstein (2014) "Teach for America has faced criticism for years. Now it's listening – and changing." September 5, 2014. Vox. <http://www.vox.com/2014/9/5/6079493/teach-for-america-criticism-changing>

⁶ See e.g. Iespējama misija webpage, <http://www.iespejamamisija.lv/parmums/>

⁷ Barry Tomalin, Susan Stempleski (2013) *Cultural Awareness – Resource Book for Teachers*. Oxford University Press,

⁸ As can be seen e.g. in Mārīte Lapiņa et al. (2009), "Ierosmes mācību priekšmeta "Kultūroloģija" apguvei". ISEC.

'culture as a system', and on the *Kulturprozess*.⁹ The English name of the subject, 'Cultural Studies', is therefore misleading, as the ideas of the Anglo-Saxon cultural studies school, representing cultural analysis that concentrates upon the political dynamics of contemporary culture, is virtually not represented in the Latvian framework curriculum. There is no focus on power, agency and other related notions of cultural analysis in the curriculum.

While Liene Jurgelāne's approach enriched the somewhat academic and theoretical curriculum with more insight into the connection between culture, social change and individual, it appears that she never challenged the ideological and theoretical limits of the curriculum, rather worked within them to achieve her goals of a more change-focused understanding of culture.

It is interesting to compare Liene Jurgelāne's approach to the 'Six Ways of Teaching Cultural Awareness in the Classroom' formulated by Matthew Lynch. According to Lynch, the six ways of teaching cultural awareness include:

- Express interest in the ethnic background of your students;
- Redirect your role in the classroom from instructor to facilitator;
- Maintain high expectations for student performance;
- Maintain a strict level of sensitivity to language concerns (e.g. tailoring materials to the needs of non-native speakers);
- Incorporate methods for self-testing (the connection with cultural awareness is not obvious, but Lynch draws a connection with empowering students through self-testing to check progress);
- Maintain an "inclusive" curriculum that remains respectful of differences.¹⁰

There is much more emphasis on cultural diversity within the classroom in Lynch's approach (in accordance with the basics of intercultural education), whereas Liene Jurgelāne's approach is more focused on diversity of cultural forms in the outer world. However, both approaches share the emphasis on the teacher acting as facilitator rather than instructor, on self-testing and on high expectations from the students.

The above analysis points to an important conclusion about teaching cultural awareness: the form, or the method, is an integral part of the message. While the choice of modern culture material, such as music and films, made teaching cultural awareness easier, the material per se is not enough to ensure learners' engagement. Emphasising the form (transparent rules, informal communication, group work, peer teaching, teacher's role as facilitator) is important, because without it, the given approach to teaching cultural awareness most likely would not work.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Matthew Lynch (2015) Six Ways of Teaching Cultural Awareness in the Classroom.

<http://www.theedadvocate.org/6-ways-teachers-can-foster-cultural-awareness-in-the-classroom/>

Literature

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