REPORT ON DIVERSITY SEMINAR (SUMMER, 2011)

ORGANIZED BY

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY, BALL STATE UNIVERSITY.

DANIEL DOGBE (GRADUATE STUDENT) DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION.

BACKGROUND: As a consequence of inclusivity and diversity, there is need to enhance our pedagogies in our educational systems. This is very important in higher education institutions responsible for the training of teachers. The benefits of excellent pedagogies in today's complex modern society are numerous given the fact that the world is now more globalized. The four-day summer seminar organized by the Office of Institutional Diversity at Ball State University has been very enlightening and empowering. It has broadened my horizon as far as inclusion and diversity and for that matter multicultural education is concerned. Hitherto, as a specialist teacher of persons with disabilities, I limited the concept of inclusion and or diversity to disability discourse only. Even though I am aware that there are vulnerable or marginalized groups and differences among cultures, I did not consider the other differences important at all; but now, with my experience in foreign land and my participation in the just-ended seminar, I have gained a broader outlook and an in-depth knowledge about the topic. Consequently, I have decided to bring some changes in my work when I go back to Ghana. My perspective and perception about all other related factors have been challenged. I have resolved to gradually look at my relationship with my students and colleagues in and out of classroom. In whatever I do, the issue of differences will become a priority for consideration.

INNOVATION: It is incumbent on me as a specialist teacher of blind and visually impaired students and as a participant of the summer seminar on diversity pedagogies to review my instructional strategies in the following areas when I go back to my country: *communication*, *content and pedagogy* to reflect change from the traditional monocultural system.

Communication is important if teaching and learning is to be effective. In my institution back home, there is a gap between the instructor and the students as far as interpersonal relationships are concerned. Most students do not address teachers by their names. Male instructors are addressed by the title "Sir" while the female instructors are referred to as "Madam", "Miss" or "Mrs." This attitude tends to put some aura around the instructors with some forgetting that the

learner has basic fundamental, human and educational rights. With such a relationship in class, some students do not ask questions concerning unclear instructional points because the instructor is alienated from the learner. In order to bridge this gap and contribute to the diversification of the institution, I would meet with my colleagues and inform them that in line with diversity principles, I would like to be known and called by my name (Daniel) by everybody including students. I am aware that this decisive step may bring about mixed feelings but since change comes with diversification, it has to start from somewhere so I will insist on this point and make sure it works at least in my classroom and wherever I will be. I believe that this will bring my students closer to me. They will feel free to approach me than it was in the past and that way, equity and social justice principles will be upheld. I will be a facilitator and discourage the superordinate-subordinate climate that exists in most classrooms in my country. Cognitive authority will flow from instructor to students and vice versa but not always from the teacher to the students as is usually the case; after all, a local Ghanaian proverb states, "knowledge is as huge as a baobab tree which cannot be embraced by an individual". I will make use of the students' background knowledge because research shows that excellent teaching derives from what students bring to bear on instruction. Having learnt about the various diversity axes, I will apply them in my work since my class is usually a diverse one comprising students from all the ten regions of the country. The ethnicity, religion, gender, socio-economic status, geographic location, ability status, marital status, personality, body image and appearance will all be considered during instruction.

The next issue I will introduce as an innovation in my work will center on the *content* of my instruction. Braille instruction to both the seeing and non-seeing students in an inclusive classroom is quite challenging. However, I will endeavor to vary the content of the course which hitherto centered on literary English only; for the change, it will cover all disciplines since braille itself is only a medium of communication and or instruction. Students should be able to use braille to teach other subjects such as mathematics, social studies and history when they complete their programs of study. It is not a language since it is not spoken and so cannot be listened to but it is written and read by means of raised dots. Thus, the blind and other visually impaired students use their hands to read and write it while the other students who are sighted read it with their eyes. Since every student studying it studies another teaching subject, my innovative idea is to reduce the over-dependence on the braille primer textbook which students

cram in order to pass examinations but are unable to transfer that knowledge into other situations or subject areas. This time every student will braille and read texts in their teaching subjects including journal articles on a daily basis. Most of these activities will be done in class practically while I go round to assist those having difficulties. Such a strategy will challenge me (the instructor) to be abreast of current trend in the field and avoid doing the same thing over and over again.

My *pedagogy*, the art or science of teaching will also be diversified. As already intimated, the over-reliance on the braille primer textbook will be a thing of the past. When students register for the course, I will find out their individual teaching subjects and get relevant texts in these subjects from the library or from the various teaching subject departments. The braille primer textbook will not be abandoned but it will be used as a reference book since it only contains rules and selected passages for learners to learn how to braille. I will also make available some journal articles to be worked on. Apart from individual studies, braille reading in class will be a group activity to be undertaken in small groups of at least two and at most three. There will also be periods for transcription work. I will use the computerized braille embosser to braille some texts for the students to transcribe from braille into print. Thus, the pedagogy will now comprise individualized and group instruction, brailing, braille reading, and transcription from braille to print.

Finally, I will also vary the one-way evaluation style. I will introduce into my instructional activities, teacher evaluation procedure every fortnight in order to get feedback regarding my work as far as braille instruction is concerned.

NOTE: I have used braille in this report both as a verb and noun.

SEV 353: ADVANCED BRAILLE

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The instructor will guide students to acquire skills in contracted literary braille reading and writing and transcription. Students will acquire competence in reading and writing braille using the hand frame and stylus (there are not enough braillers to go round). In addition, the students will be introduced to topical issues in braille mathematics such as abacus and the cubarithm and other teaching subjects. Finally, students will be assigned hands-on class-based activities to ensure proficiency in braille reading and writing and transcription.

Method of Delivery: Black board demonstrations, individual studies and group work.

CONTENT/COVERAGE

- Lower word signs
- Lower word signs continued
- Assessment
- Quiz/lesson 13 of braille primer
- Lesson 14 of braille primer
- . Assessment
- Abacus
- Subtraction
- . Assessment
- Composite signs
- Shortforms or abbreviations primer pp.46; 50/lesson 16.

• Last group of word signs with dot 5
. Assessment
Some Reading lists:
Scholl, G.T (1986) (Ed). Foundations of Education for Blind and Visually Handicapped Children
and Youth: Theory and Practice. American Foundations for the Blind, Inc.
Royal National Institute for the Blind (1992) Braille Primer, London: RNIB.
Selected Journal Articles
Selected texts from students' teaching subjects, for example Mathematics, Social Studies,
English Language, Science, and Music.
Internet sources: By students.