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The ways in which humans interact with one another is reliant upon many factors including identity, culture, ethnicity, race, social class, sex, and gender. These factors affect how we interact in society, within our groups, in the roles we fulfill, and in our education system. Culture is how we interact with one another, is constructed by society, and transmitted from one generation to the next. Culture varies between groups and cultural diversity can either lead to cultural divides or an awareness and celebration of cultural uniqueness. As educators in a ever increasingly diverse world, we must establish culturally responsive teaching in our classrooms affirming the cultures of all students, expressing value in differences, and reflecting the gamut of cultures in our curriculum (Gollnick & Chinn, 2013).

We learn about various cultures from around the world by studying art and how the artworks' unique attributes contribute to the world's beauty. This project is particularly rewarding when our international students or study abroad students present on countries they are from or have traveled to. Each student researches multiple aspects of their chosen culture, makes various connections between culture, history, artists, and their own current art projects, and then provides a presentation for the class so we can learn about and appreciate various cultures.

Socially constructed cultures are practiced by groups of people who may self-identify or be identified by their ethnic group, social class, sex, gender, or combination of these categorizations. Ethnicity is membership based on national origin. Social class is defined by a groups access to economic, political, and cultural resources and determines our access to social

resources such as schools. Sex is our physical biology as male or female, while gender is socially constructed behaviors defined as masculine or feminine. Membership in groups is based upon these various means for identification (Gollnick & Chinn, 2013).

In social identity theory and identity theory an identity is formed reflexively in objectifying self in order to categorize, classify, and name self in relation to other social classifications. Social identity theory outlines a means for self-categorization within groups. This group holds common social identification by social comparisons of 'self/other' or 'in/out' groups formed by perceived similarities between self and group and the social comparison of selectively accentuating self/group from 'other' for self enhancing outcomes (Stets & Burke, 2000). Gollnick and Chinn (2013, p. 60) refer to this as the, "discriminatory practices that have protected the superior status of the dominant group for centuries." According to Kytte, this would be a conscious effort to protect the superior status of a defined group (Kytte, 1978).

In identity theory identification depends upon the occupancy of a defined role and the defined expectations of the role in society. The culturally set standards and expectations of the role guide behavior and resources and the control of resources defines social structures (Stets & Burke, 2000). This resembles the definitions of culture and social class. In both social identity theory and identity theory an individual's view of self, self-categorization or role, is constructed by existing meanings in an already structured society (2000).

We have an innate human need to categorize, enabling us to make sense of various aspects in the world around us. As we try to identify ourselves by the groups to which we belong, the roles we fill, and the way we dress to fit those groups and roles, it is difficult, but necessary

for us to constantly remind ourselves and our students where our true and only identity rests in Christ alone.

Social Learning theory is behavior acquired through the mimicking of actions, body language, expressions, and responses in social situations. Behavior is acquired, maintained, and modified based upon the individual or group who is being mimicked and a self-regulatory control of behavior (Kytte, 1978). Interestingly, this definition is also similar to our understanding of the development of culture.

As we learn by role models and mimicking, effective role models must demonstrate and check for set personal standards, self-evaluation by the set standards, and constructed consequences. As students learn how to self-regulate and self-manage their learning, they will become self-sufficient learners under the guidance of an instructor. They will have a set framework and example of how to become self-regulated learners. As role models and leaders, we must demonstrate and strive to understand and embrace our differences.

As teachers we can strive to understand and embrace other cultures in our curriculum. My cultural projects provide students with a means for learning about another culture. It also helps students to make connections between their artwork and influences from other cultures.

“Critical theory provides a lens for interpreting what happens in classrooms and provides conceptual and epistemological grounding for changing the direction of research in education” (Lynn et al, 2006, p.17). Critical theorists ask what constitutes power, who holds power, and in what ways power is utilized to benefit those already in power. Lynn, Benigno, Williams, Park and Mitchell (2006) suggest that “a critical theory that incorporates analyses of

race, class, and gender oppression can be an important tool for framing, analyzing, and calling attention to unjust conditions” in school structures” (Lynn et al, 2006, p.19).

The pedagogy of poverty refers to teaching practices which dehumanize students and devalues students’ culture, race, class, ethnicity, and gender identities. Teachers creating transformative intellectuals “validate students’ prior experiences, engage them in a critical evaluation of these experiences, and encourage the implementation of an emancipatory curriculum” (Lynn et al, 2006, p. 21). Including student culture and student voice in class allows students to achieve by using their ways of knowing. Recognizing inequalities in the classroom and in our society as a whole, prompts teachers and students to think about social change. Gollnick and Chinn second this concept stating that, “achievement is improved when teachers help students interact with the academic content through discussion and authenticity, relating the content to students’ prior experiences and real-world applications” (Lynn et al, 2006).

The United States education system provides service to students from a myriad of backgrounds. Inequity in the school system cannot continue if we claim the land of equal opportunity. Teachers must avoid social stratification, ranking people based upon income, education, occupation, wealth, or power (Gollnick & Chinn, 2013). This presents an issue in identity for the United States. We are a mixing pot, while devaluing groups of people by differences. In order to change school culture, we must first understand the greater social context in which a school exists. Teachers can no longer idly participate in an oppressive system, but instead must promote culturally responsive teaching methods for social justice and equality (Lynn et al, 2006).

References

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