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Professional Analysis #1

Inclusivity in the Classroom

ADO 350

As a social studies teacher, there is no way that I can teach my students to the best of my ability without first examining my own lens and perspective. Even in the very beginning of the book, Singer takes the time to examine his own identity in relation to his teaching practice and perspective of social studies. Singer (2015) states, "My name is Alan Singer, I am a white male, heterosexual, senior citizen, husband, father, grandfather, son, brother, college-educated, politically active, ethnic Jew, citizen of the United States" (p.3). Although these elements of his identity are separate from being a teacher, they all influence how he teaches and why he chooses to teach in that way.

My own identity is something that I've had to consider throughout my placement experiences, but there is one recent moment that comes to mind. One of the lessons for the active citizenship senior classes covered the concept of *intersectionality.* This is a sociological framework for understanding how individuals' hold multiple identities that intersect and determine the challenges they may face in interactions with other groups. I first encountered this concept freshman year in SOC 101, where I was thrown into a world of identity that I hadn't considered before. We were instructed to fill out a blank diagram of a person's profile, filling it with our own relationship with intersectionality in terms of race, religion, class, ability, and other defining traits. I was able to present my diagram to my practicum classes and review each student's profile. It was fascinating to see how each unique identity was represented in an array

of different colors, drawings, and words. For myself, the synopsis of my identity goes as follows; I am a woman, Hispanic/Latina, first-generation college student, oldest sister, child of immigrant parents, middle class, heterosexual ally, New Yorker, studying to be a social studies educator. Upon presenting my diagram to the class, I immediately noticed that students began to feel more comfortable speaking with me about their experiences being people of color or the first in their family to do things similar to me. Every nod, smile, and conversation proved how important it is for students to understand who their teachers are and how teachers care about who they are too. This experience served as a reminder of the diversity found in my students but also the diversity found in myself.

Throughout my classroom experiences, I've had to examine deep biases and perspectives that I didn't even know that I had to formulate my personal pedagogical beliefs. Much of my perception on teaching revolves around the idea of culturally responsive/relevant teaching, which is the idea of considering our students' cultural backgrounds and incorporating them into the curriculum. Much of this comes from my own personal experiences being a person of color in a minority group. At times, I couldn't see myself reflected in the curriculum, even though I have now had the privilege of educating myself on the impact that minority groups have had in the history of the United States. But what if I didn't come to college? I would have never known.

Gloria Ladson-Billings' book, *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Asking a Different Question* (2021) brings up this idea of examining bias at an individual and institutional level as she writes, "The individual aspect of her work requires teachers to know and understand themselves…At the institutional level, Kailin's approach prompts teachers to examine the historical roots of institutional racism in the United States as well as the ways that texts and curricula and schools as institutions support racism" (p. 115). For me, this concept of examining

bias comes through thoroughly understanding our curriculum in terms of who writes it, who edits it, and who it's meant for. Culturally responsive teaching is more than just culture; it's about making sure that every student, no matter how different, feels represented in the classroom. It is about ideas of equity, diversity, and inclusion for all students.

My personal belief is that if a student can personally connect to even a portion of the content, they will then pursue further inquiry into the subject matter. Detra Price-Dennis and Yolanda Sealy-Ruiz's book, *Advancing Racial Literacies in Teacher Education*: *Activism for Equity in Digital Spaces* (2021), defines this idea of culturally responsive teaching with emphasis on creating a safe space for students, as they write that, "Creating an environment that supports and sustains student learning success is linked to the teacher's ability to narrow the gap that separates how teachers and students understand one another" (p.76). The key words in this definition are narrowing the gap. If there is a gap between students and teachers, then how will we be able to have constructive conversations that foster learning? Oftentimes, people confuse this gap for respect. They think that there needs to be a gap between students and teachers to have a classroom based on respect, as students will view teachers as the ones running the show. However, I don't think this is necessarily true. School should be a place where students and teachers can work together to foster environments of learning that inherently bring in respect with the notion of understanding and supporting each other's identities.

To foster this environment of understanding, much of my pedagogical philosophy also focuses on inquiry-based learning with an emphasis on building literacy skills. After the world of primary and secondary education, it is unknown if my students will have the opportunity to pursue higher education. However, I do believe that they should each have the opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge that higher education utilizes in terms of creating questions and

claims that require higher order thinking. This comes from the personal experience of being a first-generation college student. In college, I've been granted the privilege of having rich discussions where I've been able to gather my own conclusions on social studies through constructive interactions with my peers and educators. It pains me to think of students that don't have this privilege. Therefore, I aim to foster a classroom environment that celebrates literacy and provides opportunities for students to create their own identities through inquiry. In their book, Wolsey and Lapp (2024) presented the question, "Are we preparing students to have the literary skills they will need to function in the workplace?' (p. 18).

This is a question I consider constantly. In the workplace, people are constantly collaborating, questioning, and creating. For me, this is something that must begin in the classroom. In my practicum, many of my students will go on to technical fields, but the concepts of social studies transcend through all fields. I watch many of them engage in inquiry, asking questions about why their city hasn't fixed certain socioeconomic issues and creating conclusions on how to push their government to do so. Recently, they did a map project where they chose an issue they feel the city needs to address. Waste management, city beautification, and safety were all issues they brought up, as they questioned and used their own experiences as evidence.

In my classroom, students will have the opportunity to create their own questions and conclusions on social studies concepts to comprehend the past, understand their present, and face their future. By creating a safe environment where students feel represented and respected for their differences, I believe that culturally responsive pedagogy and an emphasis on inquiry-based learning and literacy will achieve this.

Works Cited

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