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GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE UNITED STATES SOCIAL JUSTICE CLASSES: IMPACT ON IDENTITY

**Identity & Leadership in the Context of Social Change,
Community of Scholars Day, Lesley University**

March 28, 2018

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Academics often serve as a trigger for prior pain, and will invariably include times of confusion, conflict, and discomfort, which can lead to transformative growth opportunities

Chen, 2014, p. 408



CONTEXT OF THE CLASS (CORLISS)

- Hybrid
- 8 weeks online
- Daily one week in person
- Intersections of human rights/social justice
- Access to different theoretical perspectives. Focus on institutional oppression
- Social justice = full and equal participations of all groups in a mutually designed society
- Goals: identify social injustice, etc
- Race, class, gender, and intersectionality
- Problem of practice



ADULT LEARNING AND IDENTITY

- Learning and identity (sense of self) are intertwined
- Learning = renegotiating of meaning, including understanding self (Hutchings, 2014)
- Learning = (re)constructing sense of self through use of language (Rezaei, 2016; Kim, 2014), re-examining and building upon prior knowledge (Chen, 2014), and engaging in learning activities, such as writing (Hutchings, 2014)
- Post-structuralist's view on the identity – multiple, changeable, “a site of struggle” (Rezaei, 2016, p. 3), intersectional (Capper & Young, 2014)
- Student identity development:
 - What do I bring in?
 - Does it get reflected in the curriculum?
 - How the above impacts development of my personal/professional identities?
- How does identity development continue post-student experience (i.e., faculty, social justice educator, professional, etc.)



SASHA'S EXPERIENCE IN THE CLASS

- Peers: approx. 30 students, approx. 5 identified as not from the US or extensive experience of living outside of the US
- Materials: **42 assigned readings**/8 weeks (1 UK, 1 France, 2 Canada, 1 Australia/US, **37 USA**, 2 mention global perspectives)
- Instructor: Corliss, one of the very few African-American professors
- Global perspective = different that few can relate to
- Replication of other experiences in other classes: being met with silence or defensiveness/passive-aggressiveness
- Replication of experiences outside of classes, primarily work: the process of “unwelcoming”



CORLISS

- Surprised by criticism from Sasha
- Helps me to analyze my story – never felt the need to understand global perspective deeply
- Reflecting on my global experiences: going across the boarder to Canada at age 15, at age 30 – travelling to conferences etc.
- Global perspective = international travel = class privilege in the US
- Principles of culturally-responsive educators



UNDERSTANDING CLASS EXPERIENCES THROUGH METHODOLOGICAL NATIONALISM

- MN = “assumption that the natural category or unit of analysis for society is defined by national boundary” (Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013, p. 20)
- This assumption “becomes the all-encompassing presupposition upon which the most important features of modernity are explicated” (Chernilo, 2011, p. 99)
- This assumption is deeply rooted and largely defines **research** and **practice** in social sciences, political discourse, legislation, intra- and inter-state relations, education, social justice studies, etc.
- Link to social justice: MN melts together 4 separate notions of peoplehood (a sovereign entity, citizens with equal rights, a solidarity group, and an ethnic community) (Wimmer & Schiller, 2003)



PROBLEMATIZING MN/CLASS CONTEXT

- MN is reductionistic and problematic:
 - Processes outside of “national container” are disregarded (Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013; Wimmer & Schiller, 2003)
 - Progress or modernity is viewed as an accomplishment of only few nation-states (Eurocentrism) (Chernilo, 2011)
 - Emphasis is placed on integration and homogeneity rather than diversity – normalizing color lines (Schiller 2009; Wimmer & Schiller, 2003)
 - National interests are equated with the purpose of social sciences (Wimmer & Schiller, 2003)
- Suggested alternatives (**global perspective**):
 - Envisioning modernity “as a single evolutionary accomplishment of the human species” (Chernilo, 2011, p. 106), only then differentiate
 - Viewing social processes as those that “intersect and transform discrete territoriality” (Schiller, 2003, p. 112)
 - Analyzing internal processes in relations to the global processes that drive inequality (Schiller, 2009; Wimmer & Schiller, 2003)



CORLISS: LESSONS LEARNED

- **Experiential learning as an instructor (Dewey, 1938/1997; Kolb, 1984)**
- **Preparing Teachers to Be Culturally Responsive (Villegas & Lucas, 2002)**
 - **Sociocultural Consciousness**
 - **Developing an Affirming Attitude towards Students from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds**
 - **Developing the Commitment and Skills to Act as Agents of Change**
 - **Embracing the Constructivist Foundations of Culturally Responsive Teaching**



SASHA: LESSONS LEARNED

- My voice being heard by someone holding power (Corliss) – healing process, helped to reclaim some of my humanity back
- Corliss modeled teacher-student relationship as mutual learning
- Understanding Corliss' positionality through honest dialogue – helped to (re)consider how to present global perspectives in a way that is not alienating but fosters the dialogue
- Empowered me to take action outside of the class: teaching, job, etc.



SYNTHESIS AND TAKE AWAYS

- US-based discourse as a *part* of the global conversation
- Connection between local and global power and marginalization
- Education without global perspectives can potentially be oppressive to some groups
- At the same time, education is a powerful tool for social justice when there are mutually learning processes happening across all members of a community, including instructors.



IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Teacher-student dialogue, especially around uncomfortable topics that they do not agree on as a starting point **is a social justice project of and in itself** as it allows for mutual influence and involves treating each other with equal dignity and respect
- Additional professional development for instructors
- Need for more than one "diversity" person
- Re-examine social justice-oriented courses in order to ensure global perspectives are represented



SUGGESTIONS FOR INTEGRATING GP INTO TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

- Thinking outside of the “national container”
- Integrating research coming out of the globe-spanning organizations on global human rights such as UN, UNESCO, etc.
- Examining institutional roles within and outside of “national container” and associated power politics
- Explore how global power distribution shapes how *local* social justice projects are defined and addressed (i.e., anti-immigration sentiment, racism, sexism, etc.)



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