

When learners learn something new, they connect it to prior knowledge. Ormrod (2009) says this is one of the ways we store information in long-term memory. *Organization* is the process of connecting a new idea to old ones through their relationships, such as categorial, hierarchical, or cause and effect relationships. They settle new information within prior knowledge in a logical structure (p. 32). In a social context, when we meet someone new, we like to form categorial relationships with them.

The first trait we notice about a person is his or her gender. When a new child is born, we want to know above all else what that child's gender is, and the child is considered male or female above all other traits such as skin color, height, etc. (Carroll, 2007, p. 74). Among gender we notice other visible traits about a new person, and as we get to know more about them, we start to categorize them. I believe this is because we humans feel comfortable when we can analyze something and thus we fear what we cannot understand. The problem with categorization is stereotype threat. Steele (1997) defines *stereotype threat* as an idiom that can affect members of any group if there exists a negative stereotype about that group. When we meet someone new, we may inadvertently form positive or negative bias about them because of the category we have put them in upon meeting them. It is only until later that our knowledge of them can affirm or deny this stereotype.

Stereotype threat is even more complicated because it may be considered negative in one group while it may be considered positive in another group (at which point it is no longer a "threat"). When a member identified with a group conforms to a positive stereotype as seen by that group, he or she is 'rewarded,' so to speak. However this stereotype may be seen as positive only within that group, and if the group is a minority group, it is probably viewed as a negative

stereotype outside of that group. In this case, a member of that group, when located outside the group's social context, may experience *disidentification*, at which point the member may no longer identify with the minority group only to please the majority group. Disidentification may lead to a diminishing of self-identity. This is common among adolescents.

Secondary school students have a lot to worry about in and out of school. What with academics, extracurricular clubs, activities, and/or sports, family affairs, social life, and personal life, these students need someone to whom to relate. It is common for students to form groups within a student body and even sub-groups within those groups. With each group, especially the minority groups, stereotypes exist and thus stereotype threat exists. The pressure from teachers, parents, and peers can be overwhelming. The more relationships students form with their superiors, the more they can be guided in the "correct" (societally-defined) direction. That's where teachers come in.

In order to form good relationships with my students, I have to keep an open mind and consider all my students' traits and backgrounds. Not only are ethnicity, gender, and class to be taken into account, but also the students' colloquial language, home life, activity outside of school, friends, relationships, and more. Keeping track of all these aspects of all my students is a nearly impossible task, but getting to know my students on a personal level can bring me that much closer. In addition, teachers should be willing to educate themselves in societal and cultural matters, including majority culture and minority cultures. When teachers learn more about a culture they can make more culturally relevant instructional decisions.

Ogbu (1992) rejects both the theories of *Core Curriculum Education* and *Multicultural Education*. Each theories cannot solve the problem of minority students performing under their

majority peers. Part of this achievement gap is caused by the fact that many minority students speak a different dialect at home than they do in school. Teachers may not necessarily need to adopt this language in front of their students, but they should at least acknowledge it and only correct students at appropriate times, for example, in an English grammar class. In fact, the “slang” we hear students speak in the hallways and at home is just as grammatically structured as, and is no less sophisticated than, the proper English dialect they are expected to speak in class (Gorski, 2008). According to Ogbu (1992), the problem isn’t the relationship between any one nonstandard dialect and standard English, but the fact that this relationship is different for each minority culture/language.

The reading in Kohl’s text (1994) was very effective for me. It brought a new light to my opinions and made me see things as I have not before. One of my weaknesses as a teacher is that I have trouble motivating students. When a student says he or she doesn’t want to do something, I am at a loss for words. The reason is this: I know that students are in it for themselves. If there’s no extrinsic or intrinsic reward, there’s no reason they should do anything. It wasn’t until Kohl’s “I Won’t Learn from You” chapter (p. 1) that I realized some students don’t do what they’re expected because they simply choose not to learn. In this light, I must say I am proud of these students for making this political and social informed decision. Whether I agree with that decision is another story, but at least they are thinking for themselves and understand they are responsible for their own actions.

As a math teacher, though, it is my job to make sure my students leave my class with three things: the mathematical content knowledge around which the curriculum is developed, lifelong cognitive abilities (e.g., critical thinking, problem solving, sense making,

communication, connection, representation, organization, elaboration, etc.), and an overall attitude, mannerisms, and personal skills to be deemed functional in modern society. To target all students, I must make my classroom culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Ladson-Billings (1995) agrees with Ogbu (1992) that there is a linguistic discontinuity between a student's home and school. Thus teachers should be aware of all aspects of students' culture and use it, manipulate it, into a vehicle for learning. Teachers should relate to their students as best they can.

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