Jiwoo Cheon

EDUC 3405

Dr. Sofia Villenas

May 6, 2022

My Philosophy of Teaching

For as long as I can remember I loved learning, but I have not always loved school. In particular, I have always loved math, the analytical thinking behind problem solving, and the joy of discovering elegant solutions, but at the same time I resented my love for math because it made me different from my peers. I often stood out as the only girl in a room full of boys, and I was never allowed to forget that fact. When I raised my hand and gave the correct answer, it was a lucky guess; if I didn't speak up or got something wrong, it was as they expected. My merits and faults were attributed to my presented gender, not my whole personhood. As a result, I felt like I did not belong and doubted my future and purpose in this field, regardless of how much I loved or excelled at the subject. Despite this experience, I ended up studying math and computer science in college because I found my sense of belonging thanks to teachers who convinced me that I deserve to take up space and that I offer valuable ideas as much as anyone else does. I started to believe that I belonged, and with that belief I began to participate more actively in school and to pursue further opportunities. The support of my teachers enabled me to be what Sarah Gallo calls "a fully human individual".

"A fully human individual," Gallo defines, "thinks critically, takes control and responsibility over his or her own life, and is able to maximize his or her creative and intellectual potential" (Gallo, 2017, pp. 12-13). I believe that the goal of education is to empower all students to live as fully human individuals, even in spite of challenges posed by others' prejudices against their perceived identities and backgrounds. To develop into a fully human individual, students must feel that their whole, authentic self is invited to participate in the learning process and that they are valued for their contributions. In order to create such an inclusive environment, I believe that

I need to be a learner as well as a teacher, practice humanizing engagement, and guide students to read the word and the world.

Creating a sense of belonging is particularly important for students of different cultural backgrounds who are typically excluded from the mainstream white normative curriculum. To better understand how to support such students, Gloria Ladson-Billings studied eight teachers who despite limited resources effectively taught African American students and identified key tenets of a “culturally relevant pedagogy”, which include student learning, cultural competence, and a “so what?” factor (The Brainwaves Video Anthology, 2015). Student learning describes a “comprehensive academic achievement”, not just skills measurable by tests, and it encompasses cultural competence, which requires students to “fully embrace their own culture while acquiring fluency in at least one other culture”. Building upon this foundation of academic and cultural knowledge, culturally relevant pedagogy develops the agency necessary for students to grow into a “fully human individual” by establishing a practice of asking and answering the question “so what?”. By questioning the content of their education and its relevance, the “so what?” factor enables students to use their academic knowledge to analyze and critique the world they live in. Altogether, a culturally relevant pedagogy teaches students the knowledge and critical consciousness necessary to engage in learning with their whole self.

In order to provide students with adequate support for a culturally relevant pedagogy, I first need to understand academic achievement and cultural competence in the context of each individual student. Each student comes from a unique background that determines what counts as knowledge and success and what it means to embrace one’s culture. As no amount of life experiences can give me insights into the unique background of every student, I can best learn about each student by providing them with the space to share their circumstances and priorities themselves. In *Indigenous Children’s Survivance in Public Schools* Sabzalian demonstrates the importance of learning as a teacher with Indigenous students. Ms. Carter, an elementary school teacher, shows her efforts toward a culturally relevant pedagogy in her Native American

curriculum by focusing on articles and stories from local and other regionally specific groups rather than presenting aspects of a generic “Native American” culture. At the same time, Ms. Carter positions Native cultural practices as a part of history, detached from the realities of contemporary Indegenous people. Sabzalian points out to Ms. Carter the problems of only addressing Native people as a part of the past and suggests she focus on the “here and now” rather than in the “past and over there” (Sabzalian, 2019, p. 91). Ms. Carter, to Sabzalian’s surprise, responds with “gratitude” and an “earnest desire to reconsider what she taught” (Sabzalian, 2019, p. 81). She takes Sabzalian’s suggestions seriously and later reaches out to her about offering present-day Native role models as options for a wax museum activity. This purposeful change gives Erin, a Native student, the opportunity to “see herself in the curriculum and to nurture a sense of pride in her own Native culture” (Sabzalian, 2019, p. 93). The effort to incorporate contemporary Indigenous figures into the Native American unit also gives way to a complex discussion about authentic representation and the burden of authenticity on Indigenous students and students of color, which likely would have never arose without Ms. Carter taking a chance to shift the curriculum. By learning as a teacher and creating space for her Indigenous students to express themselves, Ms. Carter helped students bring more of themselves into the classroom, and she in turn learned about the challenges of cultural expression set by a legacy of Indigenous erasure and stereotypes, furthering the goal of cultural competency in her students.

A humanizing approach to family engagement is one practice that facilitates learning as a teacher. As Gallo defines, “humanizing family engagement is an approach to family-school collaboration that privileges interpersonal relationships founded in mutual trust, in which educators and family members purposefully learn across their differences” for the shared goal of supporting children’s learning (2017a, p. 13). By learning from diverse families, teachers can recognize the benefits from a wider range of parent involvement and understand how to best support students in different contexts of family engagement. In *Mi Padre: Mexican Immigrant*

Fathers and Their Children's Education, Gallo shares how Mrs. Dreschner, a tenured elementary school teacher, established rapport with Mateo, the father of her 2nd-grade student Abi, through parent teacher conferences. Teachers tend to address only the mother in parent-teacher communication and regard them as the sole individual responsible for schooling children at home. When Mateo came alone to the conference, Mrs. Dreschner recognized her surprise at his presence and started to acknowledge both parents' role in family engagement. She intentionally changed her mannerisms by explicitly welcoming him into her classroom. addressing him directly with her questions, and using approachable language. As a result, "Mateo felt that he could risk naming the things that he was unsure of related to his daughter's schooling" (Gallo, 2017b, p. 46). Mrs. Dreschner learned from Mateo how he supported his daughter's learning at home and the challenges immigrant families face to provide education for their children. Ultimately, Mrs. Dreschner collaborated with Mateo to come up with ways to enhance Abi's academic achievement.

Learning to "read the word" and to "read the world" through activities that relate to relevant sociopolitical topics and "tinker" with existing media implements what Ladson-Billings calls the "so what?" factor. Eric Gustein takes mathematics beyond the classroom by guiding his students to apply common numerical skills in analyzing social and political issues relevant to his students. In one real world activity, Gutstein's students computed median incomes and housing costs in a nearby neighborhood to understand how gentrification affects the community through the creation of jobs and rising property prices. The students "read the word" by practicing mathematical skills and "read the world" by analyzing "the complexities of a serious community issue" (Gutstein, 2007, p. 430). They also took a stance by writing an essay explaining their views about the gentrification of the neighborhood, and they witnessed the issue unfold in real time when they attended City Hall hearings. Through numerical analyses and presentation of the issue in real-world contexts, the project allowed students to see themselves as an active participant in sociopolitical change, clearly addressing the "so what?" aspect of mathematics.

Through “reading the world” the students gained a sense of agency and an understanding of the stake that they have in their education and issues faced by their communities.

As another way to develop students' critical consciousness Wargo suggests “tinkering”, which “creates new ways for reading the word and the world” through a “shift in normative thinking” and “playful experimentation” (2019, p. 19). In a class with prospective elementary teachers, Wargo and his students critically examined how “LGBTQ2 issues were amplified, silenced, and/or made present or invisible” by classic children’s picture books, and they “queered” the books by altering the physical material and structure in ways that reflected their understanding of gender identity, sexual orientation, and desire (2019, p. 22). The teachers’ works challenged young students to respond to questions about their identities and expressions and to reflect on their own understandings of “queer”. Through “tinkering” students and teachers connected traditional media to LGBTQ2 issues, broadened their understanding of diverse gender and sexual experiences, and unpacked how social injustices, such as transphobia and homophobia, impact LGBTQ2 identities. Tinkering provides students with a tool to engage with the complex dynamics of genders and sexualities and to answer “so what?” regarding literacy education.

To be a “fully human individual” students need more than just literacy and arithmetic skills. They must engage actively and critically with their own learning and the world around them, and they must be able to involve their whole authentic selves in order to realize their full creative and intellectual potential. Prejudices, discrimination, and other forms of biases against their identities make it more difficult for some students to fully participate in their learning, and I believe that it is my job as a teacher to foster in all of my students pride in their individuality and a firm belief in their significance even when life experiences try to convince them otherwise.

References

The Brainwaves Video Anthology. (2015, October 23). *Gloria Ladson-Billings - Successful Teachers of African American Children* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmAZjNRmaII&t=48s

Gallo, S. (2017a). From Stereotypes to Humantypes. In *Mi Padre: Mexican Immigrant Fathers and Their Children's Education* (pp. 3–20). Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Gallo, S. (2017b). Reimagining Home-Based Involvement: Fathers' Intentional Creation of Alternative Learning Environments . In *Mi Padre: Mexican Immigrant Fathers and Their Children's Education* (pp. 42–59). Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Gutstein, E. (R. (2007). "And That's Just How It Starts": Teaching Mathematics and Developing Student Agency. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, *109*(2), 420–448. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810710900203

Sabzalian, L. (2019). Native Sheroes and Complex Personhood . In *Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools* (pp. 86–112). Routledge.

Wargo, J. M. (2019). Lights! Cameras! Genders? Interrupting Hate through Classroom Tinkering, Digital Media Production and [Q]ulturally Sustaining Arts-Based Inquiry. *Theory Into Practice*, *58*(1), 18–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2018.1536919