

Critical Reading Response #2: What Have I Learned and How Will I Apply It?

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This paper serves as a brief reflection on a specific topic studies in Sociology of Education to date, specifically what I have learned and how I will apply it in the classroom during my tenure as an educator. The topic in question being the relationships between race, Systemic Racism, and the Socio-political nature of schooling. In general, I find the most eye-opening revelation regarding this topic is the relationship between poverty and poor education, and just how much poverty correlates with marginalized BIPOC communities. Furthermore, I find it ever more urgent that we as white educators become aware of these relationships, and understand why foolish concepts such as “White Pride,” are not just problematic, but detrimental to the well-being of our students and by extension society itself.

While the Indigenous peoples of Canada and Black Canadians are two distinct groups of people, we nevertheless can include them in the same group when analyzing systemic racism by the same reasoning that “White Pride” is ridiculous. As history inarguably demonstrates, the ancestors of modern day Black Canadians as well as the ancestors of modern day Indigenous Canadian’s were forcibly removed from their homes and callously stripped of their culture. In the case of the Indigenous peoples’ of Canada, the Residential School system is a prime example of this forced assimilation. In regard to Black Canadians, their ancestors were forcibly removed from their homes in Africa during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The reason why we can group Black and Indigenous Canadian’s together when performing these analyses of the socio-economic condition of the nation is the same reason the concept of “White Pride,” is, quite frankly, stupid. Generations of BIPOC communities have been stripped of their culture in some of the most barbaric ways imaginable, and as a result, their descendants today know very little of their ancestry and native culture. While this is slowly being worked on in Canada as described in

“Nourishing the Learning Spirit” (Battiste, 2013), it nevertheless remains a fact that BIPOC people can and should have pride in their skin colour, for two reasons. The first is the same reason “White Pride” is ridiculous; we as white people can trace back our history quite far, and can be proud of our ethnic heritage, as Polish, German, Scottish, or in my own case, Acadian and Hungarian. In the case of BIPOC communities, much of their culture and history is unknown to them as a direct result of the actions undertaken by the Colonial Government and wealthy white Plutocrats, and as such, their skin colour is something to be proud of, as being a BIPOC person in North America represents a shared history and societal experience. Sadly however, this experience is one of oppression, systemic racism, and cultural genocide, leading into the second reason BIPOC people should be proud of the colour of their skin: because Western culture has spent centuries instilling the opposite belief on our society. As a result, many BIPOC students feel uncomfortable, out of place, and worst of all, inferior. This has been demonstrated by a number of reports, and is exemplified in the publication, “A Message from a Black Mom to her Son” (Christensen et al., 2019). When students feel as if society doesn’t accept them, as a result of both centuries of economic oppression leading to poverty, or an inherently racist education system telling them they wouldn’t succeed anyway, they themselves become at risk of believing this to be true themselves. The BLAC Report on education proves that this is the case, in which it is stated that the majority of BIPOC communities view the education system as “biased, insensitive, and racist,” (Black Learners Advisory Council, 1994). How do we piece all this together?

There have been some anecdotal reports that BIPOC students do not perform as well academically or are as well behaved in class as their white counterparts. There are some (whose ignorance is a stain on society) who believe that there is a biological basis to this, which is of

course, untrue. Simultaneously, there are some on the other side that will, with the best of intentions, insist that this is not true and that BIPOC students are just as able to achieve as their white counterparts, which I don't believe is true either. I believe the truth is somewhere in the middle; on the basis of biology (melanin levels, to be precise) society has oppressed BIPOC communities for so long that many BIPOC students have not been put in a position to succeed the way their white counterparts have been. This is easiest explained using the Indigenous people as an example: when such a significant portion of their people are forcefully assimilated into society through the residential school system, with all the rampant abuse that that entailed, are they in a mental and emotional position to succeed, especially in a Society that has clearly expressed to them that they are inferior? Arguably not. Those people go on to get lower paying jobs, develop mental health issues, and ultimately raise a child in a poor environment. That child then has to compete with their white counterparts, the majority of which grew up in comfortable homes with enough money for both the necessities and privileges (the minority of white children who came from families that did not live these comfortable lives were not forced into their situations due to their skin colour), and as such have more barriers to overcome to achieve the same level of success. Many BIPOC students are expected to take on a great deal of responsibilities in the home life to make up the deficit caused by their lower socio-economic status, giving them less time to study and less enthusiasm in the classroom. This can result in lower grades than their white counterparts, leading to less scholarship opportunities than their white counterparts (who are more likely to have RESP's and disposable income for University costs), and ultimately limit a BIPOC student from furthering their education in a post-secondary setting. This results in a lower paying job and mental health issues, and the cycle continues.

To conclude this paper, I will apply all of the above knowledge to my classroom by ensuring it is a space in which BIPOC students feel safe, included, and most importantly, loved. This can be done by basing my teaching in a humanist pedagogy, but also, I can accomplish this by doing my best to personally make up the deficits caused by societal inequalities for my underprivileged students. Purchasing pencils and notebooks and other general school supplies, putting important educational videos on thumb drives for those without access to internet, bringing food for the class every Friday and keeping snacks in my desk to ensure those who are impoverished get something to eat, and stocking up on toiletries to keep in my desk, all these are little things of very little cost to myself that can help narrow the deficit. The very fact that I undertake these actions can demonstrate to BIPOC students that I love them and by extension that the system loves them, as I am one of the faces of the education system. Furthermore, bringing in academic works from BIPOC scholars can further demonstrate that BIPOC students will always be accepted and celebrated within my classroom. In conclusion, teaching our white students the problems with concepts such as “White Pride,” while personally addressing societal disadvantages, is the best way I can contribute to evening out the playing field of Society.

References

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