

Representation  
EAD 822: Diverse Students and Families  
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We are continually subjected to confront the multifaceted dimensions of representation which exist in our society and it is imperative we examine them fully to understand their motives, how they work, and how they influence people. The less obvious factor that is often left unacknowledged, but must be deeper investigated, is how representation has become a tool used to legitimize social order, and ensure society is serving the dominant group's interests (Hall, 2006). It is difficult to resist the meaning given to us by the various forms of representation, but we must reconsider how cultural standards and norms have been designed and integrated into society to gain an heightened sense of awareness needed to challenge oppressive conditions and working towards creating equality (Titchkosky, 2006).

Representation, in its many forms, has the ability to socially construct difference and translate differences into tangible distinctions. One form of representation is ideology, and this can be defined as a widely shared belief or idea created by the dominant group in society, which reflects their experiences and serves their interests. Ideologies are problematic due to the fact they are derived from the experiences of the powerful, and at best, are only partially true, and often incomplete and distorted (Rosenblum & Travis, 2012). Stereotypes are another form of representation as they are obscured predictors or assumptions of how all members of certain groups are believed to behave or respond, despite not being grounded in historical context (Rosenblum & Travis, 2012). The ability to fix meaning to particular groups is indicative of the power which resides within the dominant groups in society, while also illustrating the position of inferiority that those being stereotyped are in as their marginalization leaves them disenfranchised from challenging the status quo. Language is another form of representation serving not only the means of reiterating or affixing meaning (Hall, 2006), but it has also evolved into a forceful mechanism of social control discouraging questioning while recommending conformity to what has become naturalized (Rosenblum & Travis, 2012). The understood paradigm of representation and its implications are not always as frank as seen in, perhaps, the Minstrel Shows in the mid-1800's; but for as long as people are denied access to authentically present their experiences and particular group's voices are omitted from popular discourse, then the persuasion of representation has merely transformed to preserve the status quo.

The dichotomy of representation must be acknowledged as representation not only receives its meaning from people, but also gives people their meaning (Titchkosky, 2006). This concept speaks to the hegemonic restraint representation has on fixating significance to some and less to others, while solidifying a position of extreme disadvantage and wide marginalization. Despite the pluralistic rhetoric found in public policy, our society remains imprisoned to asymmetrical change (Rosenblum & Travis, 2012), while perpetuating the neoliberal interests of the dominant groups (Neoliberalism as a Water Balloon , 2010). The dominant groups, through representation, are justifying their positioning and furthering their interests by exploiting the differences inherent to the categories comprising our society. For instance, minorities, particularly Asians and their association with the "model minority myth" is an attempt to justify the treatment of African Americans (Rosenblum & Travis, 2012); gender, particularly Women and the devaluation of "female" activities and the asymmetric incentives for men and women to address gender discrimination (Rosenblum & Travis, 2012); students, particularly migrant students and their pressure to abandon cultural ideals and long-held beliefs to assimilate into mainstream society (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahiticanichcha, 2001); and finally, because of how socially constructed groups are represented in the system of "castification", the chances of the dominant groups offering the same rights and obligations to them become substantially reduced (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).

As previously stated, the notion of representation is multifaceted and is distinctly impacting the ways in which education occurs in our country. The deficit frameworks in which schools are organized and their implications on the actions of educational leaders are based upon misguided understandings of school failure as merely being an inevitable outgrowth of community failure (Flessa, 2009). When schools and educators should acknowledge and act upon the structural racism and socioeconomic inequality enveloping in their students' lives, the misrepresentation of their students and communities has instead redirected their actions to lower their expectations, track students, narrow curriculum, and place division between the school and community because of their misunderstanding of the purposes of education (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Schools and educational leaders must promote opportunities to increase levels of competence and confidence, incorporate culture as point of affirmation and celebration, depend on student experiences to make learning meaningful, engage in the collective struggle against the status quo, and equip students, parents, and the community to create sociopolitical and cultural visions that challenge the hegemony of the dominant groups (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Educators often accept the pathologized representation of urban students' parents and naturally hold them accountable for the struggle they encounter as it relates to their children's education (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahiticanichcha, 2001). This false depiction of parents has limited parental support programs to merely developing methods to encourage parental support on the school's terms, instead of working collaboratively with them to create ways to employ the cultural and educational strengths of families to assist with the educational process. The educational system must redefine parental support to be utilized in more authentic ways to confront inequity. By building on family and community fortitude, relationships and partnerships are developed that are not only pivotal in educational achievement, but also the struggle as it relates to social justice and community uplift (Flessa, 2009).

The public must realize the education system has become a social institution governed by various forms of representation, while perpetuating the interests of the status quo (Rosenblum & Travis, 2012). The classroom has become a marketplace tailored to the demands of neoliberal influences grounded in false representation. The only effective way to engage and confront our schools current positioning of delineating the amount of difference that difference makes in one's life is to begin using classrooms as the battleground to interrogate representation and its consequences (Hall, 2006), explore the unequal distribution of income and resources in our nation (Sugrue, 2009), cross-examine the concept of "whiteness" (Wise, 2011), and learn, instruct, and measure growth in culturally relevant and meaningful ways (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

I must approach my profession in education with the understanding that it is the schools and our society which must change, not necessarily our students and their families (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). For as long as the focus is placed upon students changing, educators are pursuing an "assimilationist" direction which will inevitably fail, as history has shown. I must create the space for my students to practice using their voice so they are equipped to profoundly challenge the ways in which they have been falsely represented to *belong* in the lower tiers of our social hierarchy. I must understand, as an educator, I have the power to provide the space where students can achieve academic excellence, but I am also responsible to ensuring it is accomplished without forcing my students to compromise their cultural identities (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Finally, and most importantly, I must work to remodel education so it no longer prepares the oppressed to adapt to their situation, but rather prepares students to become social agents, challenging the situation that oppresses them (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

## References

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