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DISRUPTING CURRICULUM HEGEMONY THROUGH COUNTERSTORIES

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Transgress, Disrupt, Intercept: Eradicating Hegemonic Curriculum

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With the release of Disney's streaming service in 2019 came the older classic movies' release from the archive. In preparation, Disney set forth a disclaimer in the descriptions that many of the programs they were releasing possibly contained what they referred to as "outdated cultural depictions" Disney's disclaimer is a prime example that in their inception, systems, institutions, and organizations that exist within society were created before the base level equality and recognition of other cultures that exist in America today. When reviewing the mandated curriculum and textbooks currently used in the education system, educators could argue that schools also need to provide a disclaimer informing students of the outdated cultural depictions, falsified stories, glorified heroes, capitalistic motivations, and Eurocentric agenda. Instead of acknowledging the blatant disregard of authentic recollection, the current education system has pressed forward with its dated and inaccurate curriculum. De Lissovoy and Brown (2013) state that progressive educators and activists have sought to construct antiracist solidarity central to critical traditions in education that can disrupt the order and privileges of whiteness in a society

organized by White supremacy. The steadfast loyalty to the aforementioned inaccuracy directly contributes to the curriculum's hegemonic narratives and leaves instructional practice lacking validity. To combat hegemonic curriculum, it is necessary to look at the implications of social class as it relates to education, encourage education that allows students to operate from their funds of knowledge, integrate multicultural and antiracist education, and educate with intention.

IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL CLASS

While several definitions exist for the "American Dream," the phrase is most commonly known for placing false expectations of success in the minds of those who lack adequate access to achieve. The dream is rooted in the idea that you can have anything you want as long as you work hard and put in the effort (Merriam-Webster). Though diligence and work ethic are critical success factors, the financially stable people are not breaking their back at 9-5 jobs. Social class has acted as a large barrier for marginalized groups and impeded their advancement in education and careers while

leaving them to suffer and navigate the impact of poverty.

Whether individuals know it or not, stereotypes and language used to reinforce them help regulate class domination without being aware. "These classist microaggressions expose and reinforce a status quo that devalues poor and working-class people based on their social class...Moreover, classism intersects with other forms of bias to produce situations of double jeopardy for poor women, poor people of color, and members of other oppressed groups..." (Smith & Redington, 2010, p. 182). Social class's influence cannot simply be undone; it would take restructuring various ideologies and understanding the stereotypes implemented to understand how social class operates.

Consider the hegemonic thinking that if various Blacks live in a community, it is a lower-income community. As a result, this community is marked as a risk. The resources and opportunities that were once present move to what is considered a higher-class neighborhood or "safer". This inhibits members of this community from owning or achieving more than where they are because their access has been stripped away. It reinforces the bias that intersects, as Smith and Redington discussed. Gorski (2018) examines the organizations and people working to eradicate this disparity but look at it from the wrong lens. The groups put the onus on the families and students in the form of a deficit without examining how class domination has hindered their advancement.

"When we look at society and try to determine what it is that keeps most people down- what holds them back from realizing their potential as healthy, creative, productive individuals – we find institutional forces that are largely beyond individual control. Class domination is one of these forces" (Mantsios, 2013, p. 181). As explored by Mantsios, class is not something that people choose; it is the opportunities they are afforded or denied that determine and confine them. For example, students at affluent high schools have pre-

college counselors and access to test prep for standardized exams. While most of the students at these schools have several family members who have attended various higher education institutions and can afford private tutors, ensuring that they have access to these resources helps keep "the wealthy" wealthy.

In contrast, students at lower-income high schools often do not have access to opportunities outside of traditional education to advance their knowledge. Zuberi (2015) discusses creating success in urban elementary schools and the troubles students face, such as the lack of adequate funding for food, let alone education. Even if parents are not experiencing extreme hardships, there is no room for excessive spending on educational expenses like standardized test prep courses and materials. As a result, these students often do not perform well on tests and do not have the GPA or score to be eligible for scholarships to help offset education costs. However, suppose they do have the GPA or scores eligible for scholarships. Say they had access to free prep courses for students that have financial need and a college counselor. In that case, they are welcomed into institutions only to find themselves working four times harder to understand the material they should have been prepared for in high school. Stephens et al. (2014) examine how first-generation college students often receive lower grades and are more likely to drop out than students who have access to even one parent with a four-year degree. In addition to being behind in normalized education, these students do not receive the knowledge needed to create multiple streams of income through stocks, bonds, and family businesses. Without connections, they graduate (if the stress of academics does not force them to withdraw) and secure a job that barely allows them to provide themselves with a living and pay back student loans. The students who attended affluent schools are from affluent families and have access beyond means, degrees more a luxury than a necessity for their success. As stated by Gorski (2018), "Poverty is not

equally distributed" (p. 47). It is like two people trying to make it to a destination, except one of those people is given the option of stairs or a ladder, with limited access, and the other an escalator or elevator with a keycard unlocking floors not visible for those climbing.

FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

The limitation of contributions from individual perspectives encourages groupthink in educational settings. Funds of knowledge refer to the knowledge base that underlies households' productive and exchange activities (Moll and Gonzalez, 2013). Students are silenced and operate from a banking model of education without allowing students to speak from their own experience and not teaching reciprocally. The banking model of education, first referenced by Paulo Freire (1973), refers to an education that becomes an act of deposition. The students are the depositories, and the teacher is the depositor. When exploring the inadequacies within the education system, Freire's (1973) observation and analysis are vital.

While curriculum today has finally begun to consider including the stories of other cultures, it is not prioritized. When it is, filtered pieces of the story are selected by the majority and included at their discretion, never compromising the glorified identities and leaving important figures from marginalized groups nameless. With the importance of sources and accurate citations emphasized within education, it is hypocritical not to allow those who experienced to inform on their experience. Freire (1973) states, "Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of the oppression more than the oppressed?" (p. 45) As teachers of varying identities enter the education system, the inclusion of marginalized stories throughout history is discouraged by the administration

and occasionally students' families. The education system in its current existence does not encourage the curious, only the compliant. Students are given an education that prioritizes the majority's ideology and reinforces hegemonic culture, curating a society that reflects things important by their definition.

ANTIRACIST AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Biased educators develop an idea about students based on groups, and in this idea academic failure directly correlates with classism and racism. Many of these biased educators determine the curriculum and the extent to which a student is considered an expert. They also ensure that the tools needed to understand the curriculum are not readily accessible to all and exclude other cultures so that students have no representation to connect their learning with. With regard to challenging biased education, Reed-Bouley (2012) states:

"In order to achieve the goal of deep learning about white privilege and racism—which I understand to involve changes in students' knowledge, skills, and values—faculty and students need to examine carefully their incorrect mental models of race, racism, and white privilege while developing models that match evidence about the force and persistence of race, racism, and white privilege in society."

Even at the collegiate level, when students can explore other groups, there are still requirements (U.S. History being one of them) that can prevent them from graduating or advancing to the next set of courses. Klees (2020) states, what happens within the classroom and school system is a central part of critical pedagogy. Invitations are not extended to students to bring their culture into

the room because it would challenge the status quo and create what Nieto refers to as "dangerous discourses" (p. 209). Lee (2014) calls out the biased perspectives in education being spoon-fed to students from the moment they enter the system. Throughout the article, Lee (2014) discussed that a solely multicultural education by definition and execution does not grasp the tools needed to equip students, parents, and teachers to combat racism and discrimination. "Its purpose is to help us deal equitably with all the cultural and racial differences that you find in the human family. It is also a perspective that allows us to get at explanations for why things are the way they are in terms of power relationships, in terms of equality issues." (p.10) An antiracist education invites other cultural perspectives in the room for more than an event or a month; it begins discourse and incorporates it into all facets.

Today, a large issue is that different perspectives are not included, and when they are included, they are limited. "Students are the people most affected by school policies and practices, but they tend to be the least consulted about them." (Nieto, 1999, p. 191) Nieto's work examined the student experience not being considered in the discourse surrounding aspects that directly impact them. This only works to reinforce the notion that these stories are not necessary or valued in society. When developing curriculum, biased educators selected Black figures deemed docile enough to be included in the literature. In that same notion an entire story to mask Christopher Columbus's abominable nature is included and they continuously feed it to the masses. It is not enough to invite different cultures into the room if you do not value their voice. It is irrational to think that educators can completely rid the education system of oppressive ideologies. However, that does not mean educators have to submit to it. Taking the curriculum provided and dismantling it, instead of eradicating it, teaches students to question its accuracy and bias.

INTENTIONAL EDUCATION

Educators are the executors of curriculum. The reinforcement and implementation of mandated discourse maintain hegemonic curriculum and complicate curriculum reform. Null (2007) supports that the curriculum for teachers was solely based on teaching teachers to teach in its inception. Though this curriculum progressed as time went on, what teachers learn directly relates to what the education system wanted students, who would eventually grow up to be working citizens, to know. This practice could and has resulted in limited culturally responsive discourse and does not support a democratic curriculum and operates in a traditionalist perspective. Without the ability to question information being given to them or have any personal input, hegemonic ideals become all students know and what they regurgitate within society as they progress from pursuing their education. Throughout their educational experiences, especially early on, students are at their most impressionable stage, both influence by their home and school environment. To actively combat hegemonic ideals and the curriculum in institutions, educators must inform mandated curriculum and educate with intention.

To intentionally educate, educators have to feel comfortable and encouraged to challenge the prefabricated material they are given to teach. Teachers having the ability to take materials that they receive and adapt them to the groups they are working with developmentally and culturally can increase intention and understanding. Naeini and Shakouri (2016) support that transforming lessons enables teachers to create effective lessons out of resources. It is also important to consider new teachers and experienced teachers who have different skillsets and understanding to execute this task. This further emphasizes the importance of creating support for educators. Having an administration that allows educators to alter the resources they have to cater to the students'

cultural and experiential backgrounds in their class is one step in eliminating hegemony in education. Secondly, creating a community of support amongst experienced and new educators discussing the importance of culturally responsive education would be necessary to sustain its success. A newer teacher will not feel as comfortable challenging the materials given; however, teachers who have done it multiple times will have the experience and trial and error to share with newer educators to help them inform practice with minimal error.

Representation creates visibility, and with visibility comes belief. With students experiencing a lack of representation in their lessons, it is ideal to see representation in leadership. Having someone who looks like students at the head of a classroom is one form of representation and, in many ways, one of the most affirming, but not the only way to create it. Educators have the power to invite student perspective into the room and increase multicultural discourse in the curriculum. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) requires teachers to be non-judgmental and inclusive of the various cultural backgrounds to facilitate effectively (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Creating student-centered classrooms allows educators to teach with intention. Student-centered classrooms focus on making the curriculum work for the students in contrast with forcing students to adhere solely to the curriculum with no objection or input. Lightner (2018) supports that matched with culturally responsive and sociocultural teaching practices, culturally relevant pedagogy, and student-centered classrooms enhance marginalized groups' learning capabilities and disrupt traditional learning models. Instead of teaching at students, breaking down the language used by authors and in work allowed students to look at the curriculum through a personal lens. Curriculum integrated with a student's personal experience, funds of knowledge, and cultural background is likely to yield greater retention and academic growth. Educating

with intention in spaces is elucidating lessons so that students can insert themselves into them and relate them to their personal experiences. Whether it be Mathematics or English, creating familiarity can increase understanding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Social class is a cycle balanced on a carousel and created to hinder marginalized groups' progression. It is a construct kept in place so that the degradation of people can exist in various ways without being easy to point out. To eradicate class domination, you must understand the reason for its implementation and the groups it inherently targets repeatedly. The American dream definition idolizes members of a specific class who make connections and beat the system. However, it fails to acknowledge that they are a limited edition. The definition is created to keep members of a social class thinking that they can create what has only been achieved by playing a game that only the groups inflicting oppression know the rules to.

Unifying education and home life are a vital factor in transitioning the discourse surrounding curriculum. Allowing students to input their experience into the curriculum creates a perspective that cannot solely be contributed through literature. In society, experiences will not be streamlined, and what students encounter or are faced with will not be limited to what is currently mandated in the curriculum. As diversity increases within educational institutions, it is important to take advantage of the various perspectives in the room and what they can contribute to the learning environment. While there is a disparity in the literature produced and used by people of color within education, students can input their culture into education and enhance how literature is interpreted. In addition, understanding the home life of students helps to create motivation within the classroom. For example, if you know as an educator a student has limited resources at

home and maybe tasked with caring for their family after school, you can do your best to maximize their time and learning within the class and integrate learning opportunities that attune to their lifestyle. Emphasizing the importance of different cultures, familial styles, and lifestyles increase cultural competency and decrease the existence of hegemonic culture.

Dismantling the current education system and infiltrating it with the perspectives of varying identities both individually and as they intersect should be the current priority. However, instead, the priority is silencing those already voiceless. Biased education creates a detriment to the student learning experiences and informs the hegemonic culture that exists today, further oppressing the oppressed and encouraging groupthink. Creating a system that encourages students to challenge societal norms is necessary to advance as a society. Teaching with intention and allowing students to question the status quo developmentally allows them to challenge hegemonic thinking. When they proceed in society, they will feel comfortable speaking to their experience, inserting their perspective, advocating for various communities, and combatting hegemony. Though educators are at the head of distributing material, student-centered learning puts students in control of their education and understanding.

Quaye et al. (2014) discuss the importance of placing the responsibility on educators to shift their educational practices to match students of color's needs. All too often, the onus is put on students of color to assimilate to the predominately White cultural norms held while divorcing their own culture and identities from learning processes (p.16). The educators should share the responsibility of creating an inclusive environment. They are responsible for controlling and adding to the environments that shape the experiences of students across difference.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately education presents a hegemonic curriculum that informs practices within society. Social class works with capitalism to limit the educational advancement of students in lower-income communities. In addition, funds of knowledge are limited within the classroom, forcing students to operate from a banking education model, only presented as depositories for the teacher's information deposits. This action reinforces the hegemonic curriculum as students cannot question or challenge the information presented to them. In order to eradicate the hegemonic curriculum, multicultural and antiracist education is needed. The transparency accurately acknowledges history and allows students to understand how history correlates with society and the execution of capitalism and other biased practices today. To achieve an equitable curriculum, we must teach transgressively, disrupt hegemonic education, and intercept limited educational institutions' perspectives.

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