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Teaching Philosophy

I believe that minority students would benefit from having instructors that look like themselves and their families. When I was growing up I rarely met a teacher who reminded me of my father or my uncles. In elementary school, we had art day once a week with Rebecca, a local artist who specialized in clay and ceramics. Looking back to those days I feel that there was a disconnect. This happens because minority kids start to see educators and art instructors as different from the people around them outside of the classroom. I believe this disconnect could lead kids to believe that something like the Arts is exclusively for white people.

I believe that if I were to show up as an art instructor, it could benefit minority children in their outlook towards what is possible to be in life. When an educator can resemble a student's family and community members in appearance, it is possible to create a more comfortable space between the instructor and student. As nice as Rebecca was, I would find it hard to familiarize myself with her when my young brain would compare her to my overworked mother who cleaned houses for a living, maybe even Rebecca's house. It just seemed out of the realm of possibility in my young mind to one day possibly being like Rebecca. So you could summarize my young thinking in one sentence: rebecca does art, rebecca is white, my mom cleans houses, my mom is brown. So, if you asked me back then what I wanted to be, I would probably not say an artist. As kids grow up they learn visually more than anything else. There is a passage in "Critical Pedagogy," which describes what I am explaining: "...So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything—that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive—that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness. Almost never do they realize that they, too, "know things" they have learned in their relations with the world and with other women and men. Given the circumstances which have produced their duality, it is only natural that they distrust themselves." (Freire)

Every art teacher I ever had was a white person. And that goes for other subjects as well such as sciences like chemistry and geography. To me those types of subjects were out of my realm of possibility because all the adults I knew outside of school were gardeners, construction workers, house cleaners, etc. My young mind became convinced that certain jobs or professions belonged to certain people. This happened visually and I may have benefited from activities that promote thinking critically or maybe even if the school would have hired more instructors of color. There was plenty of janitors of color at that school though.

In bell hooks, the author mentions something along the lines of my teaching philosophy in her introduction to "Teaching to Transgress": "...my teachers made sure they "knew" us. They knew our parents, our economic status, where we worshipped, what our homes were like, and how we were treated in the family." (hooks, 1994, pg.3). As you read on, bell hooks outlines the disconnection with her white instructors during desegregation, a disconnection that I believe has not been fully addressed and continues to this day. A strategy I believe can be used to combat this disconnect can be found in Dewey's Pedagogic Creed: "I believe that as such simplified social life, the school life should grow gradually out of the home life; that it should take up and continue the activities with which the child is already familiar in the home." (Dewey) I believe this statement should include that visual similarities of family and community members should also be prevalent at the school as art instructors. I believe it is the arts that bring out the creativity in a child, and if that child is of color, having an art instructor of color would be the most beneficial way for that child to believe the arts is a possible future for them.

In conclusion I would like to suggest an alternative strategy for those schools, which for whatever reason, just can't seem to find art instructors of color in the area. From Reggio Emilia: "The role of the teacher as partner and co-learner is most clearly demonstrated as both child and teacher engage in collaborative learning during the process of working through a project...The teacher does not control nor dominate the child or her learning, but rather, demonstrates respect for the child's rights through mutual participation and joint action." (Reggio). I believe this approach would be most challenging for American teachers, but the act of allowing the child to become your equal, would allow for a dynamic that would make some children feel more at home and hence, more comfortable in accepting possible futures as more

realistic. Is it possible to create a learning environment in which our children become our instructors? A learning environment in which we allow the innocence of being a child hold some power over how we behave towards that magical innocence, and learn from it, and even allow that power to help us grow from it. If there is a possibility to create that space, sign me up, today even.

Resources

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