

The readings for this week were a nice end point for an extremely thought provoking semester. Lewis Madhlangobe and Stephen P. Gordon summed up some of the common themes discussed very succinctly in their article “Culturally Responsive Leadership in a Diverse School: A Case Study of a High School Leader”: “the author’s found that Faith practiced culturally responsive leadership on three levels: personal, environmental, and curricular” and that her culturally responsive leadership included different themes, like “caring, building relationships, being persistent and persuasive, being present and communicating, modeling cultural responsiveness, and fostering cultural responsiveness among others” (2012, p. 177). This quote (and article) are very representative of the ideas that we have read about and discussed throughout the duration of this course.

Throughout this course, we have covered a variety of overlapping topics. From race and ethnicity, to social class, to gender identity, to religious diversity, it is clear that students come to school with several overlapping identities. These identities cannot be simplified, and can be complex in different ways for different students. It is also clear that students who identify with minority identities, whichever they may be, tend to fail in American schools more often than they succeed.

The readings show that if we truly want our minorities to succeed in school, we, as the teachers, need to set them up for success, rather than make assumptions about their background and identity(s). This idea of setting the students up for academic success requires teachers to be caring, build relationships, be persistent and persuasive, be present and communicate, model cultural responsive, and foster cultural responsiveness among others, as was made clear by Madhlangobe and Gordon and their case study subject, Faith. This also requires teachers to give up deficit thinking, as difficult for some as that may be. Lisa Delpit said in her article “The

Silence Dialogue” that “educators must open themselves up to, and allow themselves to be affected by, those alternative voices” (1988, p. 296). We can no longer choose to think that minority students should just learn in the way the rest of the students do. As educators, we must make the leap of faith by getting rid of our old assumptions (“Oh he just doesn’t care” or “Oh wow, he worked all night so I’m just going to let him sleep”). We must push ourselves to understand each student before us, and find a way to help each individual student succeed in the classroom.

The readings throughout this class show that we are consistently not meeting the needs of our minority students. For example, African American, Latinx, and Asian American students (to name a few, but certainly not all) are consistently performing well below their Caucasian majority counterparts. There is a plethora of research to show that educators need to change their ways, and even Madhlangobe and Gordon point out that “while many educational systems and schools around the world have embraced the global concept in their work environments, many educational systems and schools in the United States have remained static” (2010, p. 200). This is still surprising, because the United States claims to be such a powerhouse in many areas, yet we fail to educate a lot of students every day.

We are consistently not meeting the needs of these minority students because our current educational system fails to make things relevant and important for them. Even as a white, female teacher, I know that my personal examples may not help my African American male students understand. Furthermore, my personal examples may not even help some of my white, female students understand because our experiences are different, and we may have differing identities, although we appear similar. Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy and Emma Maughan’s article

“Indigenous Knowledges and the Story of the Bean” show just how important connections can be in the educational world.

Over and over in the article, the student teacher gives her opinion for how she would teach the lesson or explain something to the indigenous students. She has knowledge that allows her to help her students make sense of parts of the curriculum that seemingly have no place in indigenous culture. One of the most striking examples was when she said that she would not even bother planting the plant in sand, because everyone knows that will not work. This stood out to me throughout the rest of the course, because the ideas that underlie the article can be applied to other minority groups. The student teacher is pointing out areas where the curriculum is not necessarily cohesive to the culture of the indigenous students. I cannot begin to imagine how many times something that I have taught or something that is in the curriculum does not match up to cultural norms of my students, and even when I try to explain further, they are still lost.

In the documentary “White People” there was a particular statistic that stood out to me. The information given is that it had been predicted that in less than thirty years, white people will make up less than half of the U.S. population. This is a very interesting prediction, because it makes me wonder what the white people who never think about their whiteness will do when they become the minority, and are forced to deal with being a minority after years of being a part of the white majority. Will the United States be more open to change then? Will it be too late if we wait to change until then?

I feel like I could write twenty more pages that individually analyze each article and make connections to every other article, but I won't. The theme throughout this class (and what I've tried to convey in this paper) is that our identities are interconnected, complex, and shape

the way we see the world. If you are privileged enough to be a part of a majority group, you must be aware that you are in that group. If you want to help others learn and grow, you must have some knowledge about their culture and identities. Each student who walks into a classroom comes to school with a different set of skills, identities, and cultural influences. It is the connections that they make to their own lives that will help them learn and succeed in our schools, but if teachers do not make the first effort to learn about their students, it is very possible that our minority students will continue to fail. It is time for a change, and the research is there to back it up.