

THEORY TO PRACTICE: URBAN EDUCATION THROUGH URBAN EXPERIENCES

AN INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Because of differences in ethnicity, race, culture, and lived experiences, students and teachers may not share many points of reference that can be used in urban classrooms to facilitate mastery of academic knowledge and skills (Gay, 2002). Furthermore, research indicates that curriculum content taught in schools does not give adequate treatment to the experience and contributions of ethnically diverse groups and individuals (Loewen, 1995; Takaki, 1989). With a wide variety of teachers not representing their student population (Gay, 2002), how do we bridge the gap between teachers and students so that classrooms are shared spaces where these school stakeholders can learn and grow together?

Persistent achievement disparities among students and enrollment patterns in urban schools demand serious consideration of culturally responsive teaching. Minimally, this consideration should examine: (1) why it is important to incorporate the cultural heritages, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students into education programs and practices designed for them; (2) how this can be accomplished in practice; and (3) what consequences it generates (Gay, 2002). This presentation addresses these issues which are academic, social, cultural and personal in scope.

We have created this session to support this year's theme of "*Learning Spaces: Exploring the Spectrum of Transformative Experience*." As PhD students seeking to grow our own understanding and who all have experience teaching in urban schools, we embrace the idea of expansion of the traditional classroom to be more inclusive of student's cultural and linguistic strengths. Learning takes place beyond the four walls in which we traditionally define as classrooms. (Sommer & Becker, 1974). The spaces and places in which we learn are all around us and offer a abundance of learning experiences that children in urban educational settings can and should relate to. There is significant value in educators taking advantage of the opportunities beyond the traditional textbook. Text, which is oftentimes omniscient in the eyes of the "mainstream" author. By moving beyond our own comfort zones, educators can lead students to a higher understanding of self, the community and their learning.

As a society, we cannot afford to under-educate such a substantial demographic of students because of the perceived implications both for their quality of life and their social contributions, among other things (Gay, 2002). Constructing learning activities that provide students with experiences to expand their critical understanding of historic cultural events through thematic curricula and excursions, critically exploring social issues through research and debate, as well as developing their civic responsibility and capacity in the community would benefit student learning (Kincheloe, Hayes, Rose, & Anderson, 2006) and the overall school learning community.

Through this session, participants will engage in an in-depth presentation of issues and research in urban education consisting of critical constructivist dialogue examining ideas and issues regarding teaching in an urban school setting. Once participants have an introduction to the idea of transforming theory to practice, we will share our experiences, transforming our own understandings of "urban." We will end our presentation with an introspective look for participants to begin thinking of and designing solutions in which

to expand their teaching skills and thus transform their own “classrooms” into domiciles of authentic student-centered learning.

SELECT REFERENCES

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