

Identity Reflection

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A Reflection on Identity

Part One

The reading of chapter two in Richert's book was timely. The question of "Who am I as Teacher?" is one that I am currently wrestling with in my professional life. The overarching dilemma of doing what a school requires versus tending to what your students need is a constant balancing act. Palmer is quoted saying, "Identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces" (Richert, 2012).

There is not a lot that makes me uncomfortable in groups of people when it comes to being different. I typically go with the flow and mood of the crowd and speak my mind if I feel I have something is worth saying and other people need to hear. That said, there is one piece of my identity that can sometimes invoke an emotional response. As a student going through grade school, a large part of my identity was that I was diagnosed with a learning disability. This experience is a key part in forming my current identity of a Special Education teacher.

As I reflected upon a time where I felt like I was the only one, a memory from a school trip to Washington, DC came to mind. I was traveling around D.C. with a group of high school classmates. The educational program that was hosting us joined with another group of students from another school. During one of the evening discussions about the events of the day, one of my classmates sitting next to me asked our tour leader and program guide a question. I don't remember the exact question, it must have been perceived as a "dumb question" because the student sitting on the other side of me responded under his breath, "What are you? Special Ed?" Unknown to this student was the fact that we were in fact a group of students who attended a private school that served students with mild to moderate learning disabilities.

In the moment I was too surprised that someone would make such a statement that I didn't respond to that student's comment. In hindsight and knowing what I know now, I probably would have had a quick response. This student's response not only stirred up personal feelings of anger and self-consciousness, but of embarrassment for the student who made that statement not knowing the perspective of those he was in the company of.

Part Two

As I read and listened to Laura and Rosa's story, I found that I was able to relate to the Laura's dilemma in several ways. I know a little about the emotions involved in watching a student who struggles in school navigate the academic and social expectations. Watching a student who at the very least struggle taking tests is often a heartbreaking situation to be in as a special education teacher. Especially since I know that these students have many other strengths that are not being assessed. I teach students who qualify to receive special education services, and determining where to follow the school expectations and where to nurture and guide students is a daily dilemma.

I do think that Laura handled it the best possible way she could in that moment. With the knowledge of what it feels like to be the only one, I think that giving Rosa the same test the other students were taking could potentially help Rosa feel like she is a part of the class. Giving her a different test, or not having her take it and instead read her book, could have potentially single her out as "the only one". It's hard to know which situation, struggling through a test that her peers are taking or drawing attention to her not taking the test, would have the least emotional effect on Rosa.

For this reason, I don't know if it would have been better to give Rosa a test that was comparable to the one the other students were taking. Another option that could have been considered is to have the test translated into Spanish. These options would certainly provide a better picture of Rosa's comprehension ability. However, if the goal of the test is to measure Rosa's comprehension in in the English language, then this test could potentially provide some useful data on Rosa.

This dilemma that Laura faced brought to mind what Banks referred to as Mainstream-Centric Curriculum (Banks, 2019). The test given to Laura's students does not take into consideration the experiences and knowledge of students of diverse backgrounds and languages. The school and test directions for administration prevented Laura from accommodating Rosa's learning needs, effectively removing any social equality from that testing experience.

It was interesting that Banks also notes that one factor that has slowed the widespread implementation of a multicultural curriculum is the strong focus on high stakes testing (Banks, 2020). This seems to align with the manner in which Laura's school valued the Stanford Achievement Test. The school and test in Laura's dilemma were very firm in how the Stanford was to be administered leaving no room for accommodating students with diverse learning needs. This raises the question of whether standardized tests are really the most accurate way to collect data on what a group of students know.

Resources

Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. (2019). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives (10th ed.)*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Chapters 8-10

Richert, A. (2012). *What should I do? Managing the dilemmas of teaching in urban schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. Ch. 2, pp. 18-37