

Philosophy of Education

Feelisha Teewari

ED 405C

University of California, Los Angeles

"Social justice instruction is not for the faint of heart. It demands courage because it is an act of love. Not paternalistic, missionary love, but love that transcends and connects people across generations, geographies, and genealogies" - Vajra Watson (Watson, 2016, p. 31).

### **Core Values and Goals**

My core values and goals as a social justice educator include creating an equitable classroom, creating a sense of community within the classroom, and incorporating multiple literacy methods to allow students to express themselves and their emotions.

In order to create an equitable classroom, it must incorporate students' identities, backgrounds, and cultures within the classroom setting and curriculum. I will have culturally relevant books, and books that show different identities, as well as abilities, because no one person is the same. In order to create an equitable classroom my students will practice community-building activities, such as participating in community circles every morning. We will be aware of each other's differences and we will work to appreciate them. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), in order to help foster and support academic growth in students, it is necessary to incorporate their cultural communicative styles as well (p. 466). The use of "talk-story," or storytelling events while conversing allows teachers to practice critical pedagogy by keeping students' home languages in mind. Some students communicate through stories, and some speak more directly and concisely (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 466).

I will also incorporate multiple literacies such as writing poetry, journaling, and facilitating debates about current events and historical events. Students will be able to write about their identities, their truths, how they feel, and what they believe in—they will be empowered. "I Am From..." poems will be a powerful introduction to multiple literacies because students will be able to address what represents and makes them who they are. Another powerful

poem that will be done in class is “When I look in the mirror...” According to Watson, “the mirror exercise provides an important window into the student’s self-perceptions, which inevitable shape their aspirations” (2016, p 312). Daily journaling will also help students expel emotions, ideas, thoughts, and how they are feeling overall on paper—this allows reflecting and moving letting go of negative emotions.

My classroom will be equitable, where all students, no matter how different their needs are, will be engaged in their learning. Students will be provided with supports, whether it’s done by seating arrangements, adding visuals and auditory podcasts or videos to enhance lessons, using hand signals to check-in with each other, having an area in the class where students can compose themselves when upset, and having a comfortable relationship with parents, families, and guardians; each student is different and their needs vary.

### **Theories and Research that Inform Goals**

Noddings (1984) and Valenzuela’s (1999) caring theory, which focuses on the relationship between the teacher and student, informs my goals of creating a successful community and equitable environment for my students. Caring allows students to know that they are valued, supported, and cared for by their teachers, all of which are necessary for socio-emotional learning, as well as academic learning. It is necessary for “teachers to be able to care for themselves, their students, the content, and other members of the school community. Too often, that ability to care is assumed rather than nurtured or taught” (Owens & Ennis, 2005, p 55).

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is also significant in attaining an equitable and community based classroom. Students need to have their basic needs met before they should be expected to focus on academics. Students need to be fed, they need a sufficient amount of sleep, shelter, and

they need to feel loved and valued to progress successfully. The most fundamental needs include: esteem, friendship and love, security, and physical needs. These basic four layers are referred to as “deficiency needs” by Maslow (McLeod, 2017). Maslow’s theory suggests that the basic level needs must be met before a person can desire or reach the secondary or higher level needs. Self-actualization refers to a person’s full potential and their own realization of that potential.

Furthermore, in order to implement a sense of community, creating an equitable classroom environment, and having students utilize forms of therapeutic literacy, implementing culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is crucial. Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), theorized by Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2010) embodies students’ unique cultural background, knowledge, and characteristics to inform instructional strategies and content. It is founded upon the belief that students succeed and thrive in learning environments that enables their cultural capital to be incorporated in their schooling experiences. By incorporating my students’ identities, backgrounds, and even familial language within the classroom, students will feel a sense of community, and the curriculum and content will be more equitable—black and brown children would be learning about people that they look like, and can relate to. Using multiple literacies strategies as a method to reflect on cultural units will also allow deeper thinking on historical events—debating on what students agree or disagree with is essential here. By creating culturally responsive curriculum, a more “dynamic relationship between home, community, and school cultures” will be created (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 467). In addition, CRP can also integrate therapeutic literacy within the class because students are encouraged to write about their experiences, truths, and stories. In fact, it is believed, “we don’t just read or

write”, rather “we always read or write something in some way,” so why not incorporate individuality and background (Gee, 1989)?

### **Possible Obstacles**

A couple of major obstacles to creating an equitable classroom environment and building community could be a negative school culture and students never having experienced community building. A negative school culture could impact students and their thinking process on what it means to be equitable—equitable and equal are not the same. In order to be equitable, extra support would be given to students that need it most; therefore they wouldn't be at a disadvantage with their peers. For example, if there were students who had visual impairments, they would be seated near the front of the class so they would be able to see the board better, or they would receive additional handouts to help them follow along with directions on tasks.

A negative school culture could also affect building a community in the classroom because students wouldn't have been introduced to a sense of community, looking out for each other, supporting one another, or trusting the people they spend most of their days with. The school culture itself would have to reflect community building strategies in order to sustain progress, otherwise when students move to different grade levels, teachers, and peers, the sense of community established previously would disintegrate.

### **Strategies to Overcome Possible Obstacles**

Strategies to overcome a negative school culture would be to actively work on changing the school culture. Effective communication with colleagues and administration would be the first step. Another way of changing school culture would be to open the discussion of “what would you like to see or change at school?” with the students. We would be able to brainstorm

ideas and strategies of implementing a system to see that change. In order to change a negative school culture, our attitude and viewpoints on what needs to change would have to be reevaluated in a way where we are thinking about possibilities or difficulties with an asset-based lens. In order to implement change, you need to be the change—why not get families and the community involved as well?

Strategies to build a community and sustain a sense of community within the school would also involve communicating with fellow teacher friends, colleagues, administration, and families. Incorporating families, cultures, and experiences by inviting family members to the classroom, talking to students, or interacting with the class in activities such as cultural lessons and cooking/sharing cultural foods would help build a sense of community. Families play an integral role in creating a community-based environment. Another strategy to promote a sense of community in the classroom is morning meetings that incorporate and invite discussions on home lives, hobbies, interests, relevant events, etc. This would strengthen relationships within the classroom because of the vulnerability that takes place when opening up to others.

## References

- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gee, J. P. (1989). "Discourses, socially-culturally situated educational theory, and the failure problem."
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American educational research journal*, 32(3), 465-491.
- McLeod, S. A. (2017). Maslow's hierarchy of needs.
- Noddings, Nel. (1984). *Caring, a feminine approach to ethics & moral education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Owens, L. M., & Ennis, C. D. (2005). The ethic of care in teaching: an overview of supportive literature. *Quest*, 57(4), 392-425.
- Watson, V. M. (2016). *Literacy is a civil write: The art, science, and soul of transformative classrooms*. In: R. Papa, D. M. Eadens, & D. W. Eadens (Eds.) *Social justice instruction: empowerment on the chalkboard* (pp. 307-323). New York, NY: Springer, Cham.
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling*. Albany: State University of New York Press.