BRINGING TOGETHER INQUIRY AND REPRESENTATION TO PROMOTE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM

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INQUIRY TOPIC FOCUS

What happens to a culturally-responsive history curriculum when inquiry-based learning centered on representation is regularly incorporated?

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

- 7% of students are LGBTQIA+
- 20% students live below the poverty line
- 52% of students are students of color
- “Culture is a software for the brain’s hardware that will help make sense of the world around us.” (Hammond, 2015).
- “Interventions will need to focus on reducing inequality, promoting access to quality child care and education, and supporting families in accessing basic needs such as housing and nutrition.” (Hubel et al., 2020).
- “Teacher’s knowledge of the discipline and students allowed them to adapt the curriculum to better meet students’ needs and push student’s thinking,” (Monte Sano et al., 2018).
- “Instructors can use this understanding to inform their classroom practices to offer students the opportunity to engage together the dichotomous facets of their selves and creatively restructure them,” which could be of high value for students in a questioning state of queerness, or students in the middle level grappling with their sense of identity construction (Laurier, 2009).

OBSERVATIONS

My own experiences show students benefit from inquiry in the social studies classroom, and marginalized students particularly increase engagement when the inquiry is based around minority groups.

Inquiry-based learning is the use of exploration in the classroom to dissect real-world connections through unique and high-level questioning.

- Representation will be considered if the topic touches on the over- or under-representation of marginalized groups in history.
- Inquiry also drove representation outside the curriculum in my classroom, and students became more globally-thinking historians through the encouragement of inquiry. Representation and inquiry need to be brought together in the classroom, as it drives individual and thematic representation in the history and social studies curriculum.

REPRESENTATION IN HISTORY

Social Emotional Learning, paired with Culturally-Responsive teaching and Trauma-Informed Practices, inform inclusive and safe teaching practices to help the most vulnerable populations come to class ready to learn.

Each of these teaching theories builds on the other, seeks to aid student safety, works to build student relationships, and encourages learning on the teacher’s part.

DIVISION OVER LGBTQIA+ REPRESENTATION IN HISTORY

I will aim to make sure each student sees themselves represented in sources, historical narratives, and historical discourse. By using literature, like the novels included on this poster, I will work to inform my learning as a teacher as well as student learning. Making this literature readily available and transparent to students is a valuable inquiry tool, and normalizes referencing non-dominant historical narratives and discourse each day to explain history. If a teacher can say they support their students and their students’ experiences that come as a result of their identity, they show they are working to implement CRT, SEL, and TIP in their classroom space. When a student isn’t able to advocate for themselves and their experiences, their teacher should be a safe and encouraging space to practice.

ENROLLMENT IN SCHOOLS BY RACE

‘THE TERRITORY OF THE RIGHT TO NARRATE’ (BHABA, 1994)

- Students are used to hearing stories and narratives about them, rather than by them; however, one researcher sought out to investigate how students react to curriculum when they enter the ‘territory of the right to narrate’ (Bhaba, 1994 in Martinez, 2017).
- Students, when offered a chance to counter the narratives created by years of stereotyping, prejudice, and marginalization were able to challenge the “majoritarian tale,” (Martinez, 2017).
- Students in history classrooms need the opportunity to see their history, as well as tell it in a way that is true to them.

THEORIES

Primary theories supporting this topic include trauma-informed practices (TIP), social-emotional learning practices (SEL), culturally-responsive teaching (CRT). Teaching with TIP means practicing teaching with the knowledge and implication of how factors like racism, sexism, poverty, violence, bullying, and any form of xenophobia or prejudice practices impact students and their ability to learn and engage. TIP fall under the umbrella of CRT, for CRT means basing your practices on being trauma-informed. Identifying as anything other than white, middle class, and a male means school was not built by people like you, for people like you, which means you are more likely to face adversity. Teaching in a way that counters these systemic differences works to make education match the unique culture of each student. TIP and CRT are a teacher responsibility, but SEL is where students and teachers get to collaborate on safety. The intersection of safety with identity is what these theories protect and uphold.