

Critical Reflection #2: Brilliant Not Broken

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EDUC 433.13

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St.Francis Xavier University

8 October 2019

Over these past few weeks, I have been able to reflect on how identifying with multiple social groups intersects in complex ways which can both oppress and privilege the positions we are in, my personal experiences of diversity in Toronto versus the lack of here in Antigonish, and how I can look at every child through a lens of brilliance and not brokenness in my classroom.

Two years ago, The International Basketball Federation (FIBA) removed a rule that had previously required Muslim girls to remove their religious headwear to compete. Bilqis Abdul-Qaadir is a female Muslim basketball player who had to choose between her religion and her sport as she played during a time in which this rule was enforced (Matthewson, 2018). According to Collins (2000) and Crenshaw (1995), as cited by DiAngelo & Sensory (2017), intersectionality refers to how our membership to different social groups such as class, gender, sexuality, etc. can "...simultaneously occupy both oppressed and privileged positions and that these positions intersect in complex ways" (p.138). In the case of Bilqis Abdul-Qaadir, her identities of religion and gender intersect and unjustly ask her to compromise wearing traditional religious headwear, required of females in Muslim culture, to compete at a high level of the sport. I had already been aware of intersectionality in this way in which multiple identities can oppress an individual, such as being a Muslim and female. However, what I have learned over these past few weeks in class is how intersectionality also embodies the fact that oppression and privilege can offset each other in our different social identities. From DiAngelo & Sensory (2017), an example that resonated with me was how "...poor Whites, while oppressed through classism, are also elevated by white privilege, so that to be poor and Asian...is not the same experience as being poor and White" (p. 138). This quote broadened my perspective of intersectionality and how both oppression and privilege play a role.

In these last few weeks of class, I have reflected on the demographics, specifically race, in the downtown Toronto environment I was in over the previous four years to moving to Antigonish two months ago. Professor Wendy Mackey made clear what I already knew coming to St. Francis Xavier, and that is how the vast majority of people at this school, especially those with positions of a higher power, are all White. I knew this would be a culture shock for me because I had just spent the last four years downtown Toronto, where, for the first time in my life, I felt like a minority in most rooms. I had trouble remembering the names of some children I worked with and my classmates because often their names originated from cultures that were not White. I volunteered for three years at the local Boys and Girls club in a black community where I got to see first hand how race can affect one's life. I am thankful for the diversity of cultures in Toronto because it challenged me to be uncomfortable and celebrate others. For a long time, as a White individual, I was concerned with how I was supposed to stand up in front of First Nations, or black students and even try to begin the experiences of oppression and discrimination they go through every day. However, Chrysanthius Lathan in "Dear White Teacher" (2019) says that being a white teacher does not hinder the ability to create a classroom of community and that strength does not originate from one's racial identity for neither teachers nor students. One of my goals as a pre-service teacher is not to feel pity for a child, not teach them out of pity, and to always see the brilliance, not the brokenness.

References

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