

ПОРІВНЯЛЬНА ПЕДАГОГІКА

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EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS: THE ROLE OF TEACHERS, SCHOOLS, AND POLICIES

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Abstract: In order for individuals and groups from minority groups (ethnicity, gender, social class, religion, etc.) to experience educational mobility the “educational borders” need to be open or at least porous. The ones who can open the borders are the dominant and powerful groups. A key group for opening borders and promoting educational mobility is teachers. This paper is focused on four different studies indicating why culturally diverse students both locally and globally experience little educational mobility and on ways to make teachers from the dominant group more respectful and appreciative of cultural minorities and global issues in order help the students advance in their educational careers.

Key words: educational opportunity, cultural diversity, child labour.

In order for individuals and groups from a variety of minority groups (ethnicity, gender, social class, religion, etc.) to experience educational mobility the “educational borders” need to be open or at least porous. The ones who can open the borders are the dominant and powerful groups. Hence, the dominant group(s) needs to be educated to respect and appreciate diversity in order to see the value in sharing one’s privilege. This is the case at the local, national and global level. Usually global and multicultural education efforts are directed only or mostly towards the minority groups (such as immigrant groups) while the dominant group remains as before in their thinking, attitudes and ways of behaving. A key group for opening borders and promoting educational mobility is teachers. This paper is focused on four different studies indicating why culturally diverse students both locally and globally experience little educational mobility and on ways to make teachers from the dominant group more respectful and appreciative of cultural minorities and global issues in order help the students advance in their educational careers. Most of the research for this paper is set in the American context but the patterns are in most cases not much different elsewhere.

First what do those who will become teachers know about cultural diversity, global issues as well as plain world geography? In the American context, at least, this question gained greater urgency following the 9/11 events in the U.S. At that time, it was noticeable that many teacher education students had difficulties interpreting the events. Many did not know where Afghanistan was located and appeared to have no framework for understanding the global connections of these events. Many teachers could not explain the terrorist events to their own elementary or secondary students, because they did not understand the events and the larger world context.

In a survey of 129 3rd and 4th year undergraduate teacher education students in a large teacher education program in the United States we found no common global knowledge among the students. Hence, in a discussion about global issues no knowledge could be assumed to be known by all. Most questions produced mostly incorrect responses. Some things such as the lack of knowledge about religion were particularly surprising considering the fact that the U.S. is a very religious country. For example, 65 and 86 percent, respectively, did not know that Hinduism was the main religion in India and that Islam was the main religion in Indonesia. Even more surprisingly was the fact that more than half (54%) did not identify Israel with Judaism considering that Israel and Middle Eastern issues are in the American news every day. The study shows how ignorant students were about the major cities and countries on unmarked maps of South America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Numerous and serious errors were done. For example, some identified India as Africa or Brazil as India. Even though Brazil was the country recognized by most students, it was also identified by some as India, Egypt, Kenya, or Peru. Hence, these future teachers mostly guessed about the countries and cities when looking at an unmarked map. This is further exemplified by that two of five university students pursuing a career in education fail to find South Africa on a map. This is an indication of that many students do not have a conception of where the continents are located in relation to each other. Hence, it is difficult for a student to locate South Africa if it is unclear where Africa is. Similar kind of utter ignorance shows up in other areas. For example, it is equally surprising that forty percent of students do not know about the birthplace and center of the Islamic world (Holm & Farber 2002).

Teachers are the ones who should open up the world for their students and help them find their way, but how can they do so other than in the most general terms if they themselves are largely ignorant of the world and global issues. How can they guide their students in crossing educational, cultural and geographical borders? Hence, this study shows that in order for teachers to build bridges and open borders, they need a heavy dose of straightforward information. The situation might vary to some extent from country to country but everywhere there is a fair amount of ignorance with regard to global issues. However, not only knowledge

but also the skill to view global issues and knowledge critically and from an interdisciplinary perspective is of utmost importance (e.g., Spring, 1998). This skill has to be acquired in teacher education programs.

Social class does also create borders, though mostly invisible, that hinder student mobility. Even though teachers are aware of students' socioeconomic background, the pretense is that it does not matter for their teaching or the students' learning. However, the school is firmly based on middle class values and most often the teachers themselves come from a middle class background. Hence, there might be a clash between what is valued at home and at school if students come from a poorer background. Students are labeled and classified supposedly according to academic ability but in reality it is often according to socioeconomic background instead. We know, for example, that reading groups in school are often based as much on a student's social class as reading ability. In the long run this means that students who have less educated parents are three times less likely to take academically challenging classes in high school. The differences between poor and middle class children is established already as infants since middle class mothers speak on the average 2000 words per hour with her children while a mother on welfare speaks about 600 words per hour. This means that by age 3-4 children of well educated parents have a 50% larger vocabulary than children of working class parents and a 100% larger vocabulary than children whose parents live on welfare assistance (Rothstein 2004). When children come to school a well articulated and verbal child is seen as more intelligent by adults and therefore they are treated differently and the academic expectations of them are higher. These differences often increase the longer students stay in school due to ill-equipped schools and an education based on what Haberman (1991) calls 'the pedagogy of poverty' or a regimented education focused on work sheets and control without creativity and critical thinking. The teachers have low expectations and the parents are reluctant to approach teachers and demand a better education for their children due to their own poor school experiences. In other words, poor students need a fair teacher who has high expectations of them in order for them to break out of the educational mold for poor students.

Not only differences in social class but also in ethnic and racial background between students and teachers often lead to misunderstandings and poor teaching. In other words, cultural clashes and incompatibilities can play an important role for the persistent achievement gap between the middle class students from the dominant ethnic group and the poor and/or minority students. For example, in a recent ethnography of an all girls school in one of the poorest section in one of the largest cities in the U.S. it became evident that caring and well meaning, formally competent teachers and school leaders are not enough to provide an education for inner-city youth who come from a background where there is little hope and trying to achieve in school is seen as pretty futile. The middle and high school girls in this

school refused to participate in the learning because they did not think the teachers understood or respected them and who they were. The teachers and the school leaders were culturally different and not knowledgeable about the students' cultural backgrounds and their lives. The teachers could not open the psychological or physical borders for these students because they couldn't understand why the girls did not behave as they expected them to. The teachers could not make their teaching relevant and meaningful to the students because they did not understand what was important for the students. The teachers could not open the physical borders either because often the psychological border is connected to an invisible physical border. For example, many of these students lived in poor slum like neighborhoods and never visited other neighborhoods because they did not feel they were welcomed there or had a right to be in the wealthier neighborhoods. The different neighborhoods felt unapproachable and out of reach. Despite all the financial support for this school and the good intentions of the teachers, they were not able to educate the girls for the future. Hence, what were needed were teachers and schools that can provide a culturally relevant education that is of high quality (Holm & Cobern, 2006).

In another study of a school in a town in the U.S. where 95% of the students are ethnic minority and mostly poor it was very clear that the schools were ill-equipped and understaffed (Wiley, Holm, Higdon, 2006). This is a typical pattern in the U.S. where the poorest schools might spend only \$3000 per student per year, the wealthiest spend up to \$30000 (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Despite that this town disrupted in racial rioting one summer the school chose not to work with the students on how to change the existing conditions in the town or address the students' lived experiences of hopelessness and despair. Community, empowerment, student voices, student identity, small victories, creativity, and personal accomplishments were lost in this school system. Hence, students never learned about the very high unemployment and poverty rates and the relationship of these to their own lack of school success and access to higher education. Neither did they learn about the strengths of the community via, for example, art and music. Nor was there a possibility for the students to explore their own roots in the community or the knowledge of community members through oral histories.

Many of the teachers lived outside of the city and of those teachers who were from the community they lived in middle class neighborhoods and therefore lacked the cultural knowledge to understand the youth living in poverty. This is not to say that the educators did not care and want the best for their students, but they did not know how and were provided no professional development. Classic texts and concepts, such as Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1970), or Ladson-Billings (1994) culturally-relevant curriculum would have been excellent starting places for the discussions about why students did not do well in this town. In fact, Ladson Billings (1994, p.160) suggests that culturally relevant teaching should

have three components “(a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (p. 160).” It is essential their lives and their learning be integrally connected. Students must realize that that they are of value, and this cannot be done in a cultural vacuum. Additionally, when students are educated in a way that encourages them to recognize the value of their history and community, they are more likely to continue to be a part of and positively contribute to that community in adulthood but also to venture out beyond the traditional boundaries typical for students from their ethnic and social class background. Student empowerment is necessary for students to break out of their confinement to poverty and a lack of success.

Teachers have a responsibility to educate their own students and provide opportunities and possibilities for them regardless of the students’ backgrounds. However, beyond this responsibility educators also have a more global responsibility. We in the wealthier parts of the world have also a responsibility to work to improve the educational opportunities for children in the developing world.

Children and youth working is a major obstacle in providing an education and opportunities for children to move out of poverty. However, rarely do teachers in the wealthier countries talk about child labor when talking about global issues or even education in a global perspective. Teachers have an opportunity to work for long-term change by make students aware and engaged in the issue. Again, teachers lack even the basic information as well as the more pedagogical knowledge for how to deal with the issues. The lack of information is only a superficial problem since many non-profit organizations have reliable information for students and teachers available on the internet. Several organizations like the producers of the documentary *Stolen Childhoods* and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have video clips and films available on the internet. A wealth of information is available through the ILO’s international program (IPEC) against child labour. For poor students in poor and developing countries to experience any kind of educational mobility teachers and schools in the wealthier industrialized countries need to work for global social justice.

The reality is that still in 2004 218 million children were working and not attending school at all or attending only part of the school year. In addition, 126 million were working in hazardous jobs. Of these 8.4 million worked in unconditionally worst forms of child labour, which include trafficking, forced and bonded labour, armed conflict, prostitution and pornography and other illicit activities (ILO, 2006). One hundred and forty countries have ratified the ILO’s convention against child labour, but child labour still exists in many of them. Most of the child labourers are found in poor countries but in countries like the U.S., migrant workers’ children often work along the parents in the field. Of the 800, 000

children who migrate with their families in the U.S. every year, 65% eventually drop out because of the amount of school they miss every year make them fall too far behind (<http://www.stolenchildhoods.org>). This is a clear example of how child labour is caused by poverty but also how it perpetuates poverty (Holm, Higdon, Caldwell 2005). To break this kind of cycle of poverty countries like Mexico and Brazil now offer programs where families are paid a monthly stipend if their child attends school full time instead of working (see, for example, Bourguignon, Ferreira, & Leite, 2003). Strong governmental policies can support schools and teachers in providing educational opportunities.

Hence, teachers need global knowledge and understanding in order to help their own students understand the world but also in order to work for a better world order that would open up educational possibilities for students in developing countries. Teachers need especially to become aware of lack of opportunities for child labourers and actively work for a change together with their own students. However, teachers also need to know the local communities and their students and their lives in order to provide for a high quality culturally compatible teaching. This kind of teaching will motivate the students to finish school and thereby have opportunities to move up the social and educational ladder.

The question then becomes how can pre-service and practicing teachers learn to cross their own borders to learn how to open up the world for their future students? For pre-service teachers much of the responsibility lies with the teacher educators. We need to provide actual cross-cultural experiences as well as teach the pre-service teachers how to engage in life-long global and cultural learning. For practicing teachers this has to come or at least get started through in-service training. However, most countries do not have money for life-long training for teachers concerning how teachers can open the 'border' for students locally, nationally, and globally. Hence, the responsibility lies with teachers themselves, but the spark for this life-long work can be given by teacher educators.

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**ОСВІТНІ МОЖЛИВОСТІ КУЛЬТУРНО-ДИВЕРСИТИВНИХ
СТУДЕНТІВ
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Для того, щоб індивіди з груп диверситивних меншин (етнічних, гендерних, релігійних, соціального класу, тощо) могли здобувати досвід соціальної мобільності, “освітні кордони” повинні бути відкритими. Ті, хто може відкрити межі, є домінуючими та могутніми групами. Вчителі є такою головною групою, що сприяє відкриттю кордонів і розвитку соціальної мобільності учнів. Проаналізовано чотири різні дослідження, спрямовані на вивчення причин низької соціальної мобільності диверситивних студентів у локальному та глобальному вимірі. Розглянуто шляхи, за якими педагоги з домінантних груп можуть стати більш сензитивними до диверситивності своїх учнів, що сприятиме розвитку їхньої педагогічної кар’єри.

Ключові слова: освітня можливість, культурна диверситивність, дитяча праця.

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