

The Position(ality) of the Justice-Oriented Citizenship Educator

Students and educators are diverse in diverse ways. Each has a cultural lens through which they perceive, interpret, and respond to self, others, life, and learning. This lens is shaped by life experiences as well as the social construction of identity factors such as gender, race, language, culture, religion, age, and physical ability. As a result of these factors and the value assigned to each, each person has experienced and continues to experience different combinations of advantages and disadvantages, opportunities and barriers, privilege and marginalization. In different contexts, these facets of a person's identity intersect, influencing how they position themselves and one another in social groups. They also affect the extent to which an individual or group experiences cultural continuity or discontinuity in a given context, including the classroom and school.

Our goal as educators is to create conditions of cultural continuity for all students, in particular those who have experienced and continue to experience trauma, marginalization, and inequities. According to Zaretta Hammond, author of *Cultural Responsiveness and the Brain: Providing Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, the following 5 conditions activate the brain's reward or threat-detection systems:

<i>standing</i>	status within group
<i>certainty</i>	clarity and consistency of norms
<i>autonomy</i>	agency to make choices
<i>connection</i>	relationships
<i>fairness</i>	equity

If these conditions are present, a student can co-construct cultural continuity in the learning environment; if students note the absence of one or more of these conditions, their threat-response is activated, and they respond in one or more of the following ways: fight, flight, freeze, or appease. Sustained cultural discontinuity presents a student with two choices: assimilate into dominant cultural norms of the classroom (if possible) or isolate oneself from learning tasks, peer, and teacher (through disengagement from learning tasks, disruptive behavior, social withdrawal, absences). Over time, the student may internalize a sense of inferiority and experience stereotype threat when entering new social and learning environments.

Anti-oppressive educators begin by examining implicit and explicit biases in their own practice and making adjustments which reduce the likelihood that these biases will result in cultural discontinuity for some students. (Otherwise, the teacher is cognizant that students whose cultural norms are most congruent with the teacher's will experience privileged access to learning, community, and agency). While teaching, they recognize signs of threat responses in their students, identify threatened conditions, and make adjustments / differentiate to provide them. (This includes adjustments to learning environment, interaction norms and protocols [including discourses], content, instructional strategies, and assessment).

For a teacher, identifying and transcending one's implicit or explicit biases is a deliberate, conscious, strategic act. With support, teachers can develop the emotional agility and self-regulation required to

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operate outside of their own cultural comfort zones. Their willingness and ability to tolerate the discomforts and ambiguities of cultural dislocation is key to their effectiveness as culturally responsive educators. *The teacher's investment in this personal work is correlated with their instructional capacities to support student development of the Broad Areas of Learning and Cross-Curricular Competencies at the heart of K-12 SK curricula.*

Professional learning which develops these capacities in teachers empowers them to create conditions which sustain students' experience of cultural continuity – the state of mind and heart optimal for new learning.

Sherry Van Hesteren, 2019

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