

THEORIES OF INEQUALITY, POSITIONALITY, AND CHANGE

Having anxiety, I have always found it difficult to speak up in class and form connections with my peers and teachers. Without being able to easily form these connections, I didn't allow my teachers or peers into my head to see what I was thinking, thus alienating myself from my class. I felt a lack of connection to my classes, and so I often become more of an individual learner separated from learning within the larger class. I found this lowered my grade, as I missed out on conversations about different points of view, theories, and explanations, and therefore I lost an important aspect of classroom learning.

Being apart of the CYES major has shown me how much deeper my understanding and knowledge has grown due to being a part of this close knit community. As we share deep and personal thoughts to one another, and communicate openly, I see how much this positively affects our education. I feel lucky this has been able to happen virtually this year, but I have come to see that it takes maturity and patience for both students and teachers to virtually create this community. As we openly communicate, we learn and grow from sharing personal experiences, and forming close connections to peers. Without being able to verbally express ourselves and be vulnerable, my CYES cohort would not have had such a deep level of understanding about each other and about the world around us. As I watched a kindergartener go through remote learning this year, I have seen it took his class a lot longer to form this sense of community that greatly helped me in my own learning. While his class began to form a community by January, when I stopped babysitting, it took a while for the students to be able to express themselves without crying or leaving the meeting, as they did not have the words to articulate their feelings.

With my assistance, I helped kindergartener Gary reach out to his classmates more, to help nourish and grow his classroom's sense of community. I began tutoring Gary, so he would gain confidence in his abilities, and he began to participate more in class. I talked with his teacher about how Gary was struggling without having an opportunity to speak to his classmates, so in turn his teacher created "Sharing time", 30 minutes a week where the students could share items or personal anecdotes with one another. During the first class after returning from lunch break, I encouraged Gary to greet his classmates. As he did this, it led more students to speak and get to know one another. Through my prompts and assistance, Gary began to see a sense of community within his class, became a leader, and in turn it made him happier.

This lead me to realize that not all students have someone who is able to assist them to form this sense of community. During this pandemic, many parents are working from home during the pandemic and are unable to assist their child through remote learning. Similarly, not all families can afford a babysitter, nanny, or tutor to help assist their child. There is a privilege in class and status that allows certain

children to gain assistance in communicating with their classmates and teacher while learning remotely. I know Gary would have been unable to speak with his teacher and tell her why he was upset; without me there prompting him, he would have remained silently struggling. Other students may be able to attain this sense of community if they feel they do not belong in the class, such as if the class is a majority of one specific race and a student is another race. There are many factors that go into who is able to form connections while remote learning, and more privileged classes, races, and genders have the upper hand.

Through my own experience as a CYES major, and through observing a kindergarten zoom class, I have learned how important relationships with peers and teachers can be on one's academic life, as well as in one's personal life. Had I participated more in my classes and spoke to more of my peers in class, I would have gained a larger insight into my lessons and studies and a more engaged sense of learning (Goodman, 2015). If we are able to guide youth to implement a sense of community within their classrooms, they will understand from a young age the benefits of communication and trust. Stacey Goodman refers to this practice of relationships within a classroom as "teaching through relationships," stating "Teaching through relationships passes the student through that mystical threshold when formal knowledge leads to hidden knowledge" (Goodman, 2015). However, the students must have assistance to attain this level of community, and this comes with privilege.

As a future educator, I have come to realize how I am in charge of orchestrating this sense of community for my students. Wynita Harmon, an educator, says, "Building relationships with your students has a huge impact on behavior and academic success" (Harmon, 2017). As I move on to having my own classroom, I will focus on my relationships with my students, and helping my students form relationships with one another, so that students feel they can share anything and become vulnerable with the rest of the class. I need to go into my classroom keeping in mind my identity as a white woman, and continue to think about it as I form relationships with students who have different identities than myself. As I will be teaching youth, my hope is by opening them up to this idea of the classroom forming a close knit community, it will encourage them to make these bonds in their future classes for when they are older. By focusing on relationships, I will focus on making the atmosphere of my classroom welcoming, and a safe space to share, so that my future students feel the same sense of community within the classroom that I have felt while in my CYES cohort.

Harmon, W. (2021, April 30). Why building relationships should be at the center of everything you do. Retrieved May 17, 2021, from <https://theartofeducation.edu/2017/08/28/5-strategies-help-build-relationships-students-order-improve-classroom-management/>

Goodman, S. (2015, February 25). The importance of teaching through relationships. Retrieved May 17, 2021, from <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/importance-teaching-through-relationships-stacey-goodman>

<https://theartofeducation.edu/2017/08/28/5-strategies-help-build-relationships-students-order-improve-classroom-management/>

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