

Original Paper

Culture Clash and the Oppression Olympics

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Abstract

Cultural proficiency opens the window to understanding diversity and its value in society. Studies have shown that when communities organize, have the ability to see the differences, and respond positively, their interactions are effective in diverse environments. Alliance-forming approaches to grapple with inequities substantiate the need for communities of color to collaborate and willingly address power imbalances by speaking out against systems of oppression. Instead of engaging in divisive forms of advocacy, cultural humility encourages critical self-reflection and acknowledges that unhealthy comparison about racial oppression implies that power structures and privilege are reserved for one specific group. This critical commentary calls for increased solidarity and compassion to learn from one another to further the movement towards an anti-racist society.

Keywords

Critical Humility, oppression, Social Change

The need to create a healthy space for students to discuss race is becoming ever-more prevalent. When these opportunities are absent, students are being denied the opportunity to develop a critical consciousness about who they are and understand the essential part of their being. The racism marathon continues, and the last time I checked, there was no podium to stand on and receive a gold medal with a song of victory being played for which group is oppressed the most. Teachers can reflect on the importance of what they accept matters as much as what they do. Elizabeth Martinez suggests the fear of *Oppression Olympics* is that when the focus shifts to one group's fight for equality, it can make others may be left behind (cited in Dhamoon, 2011). Living in comparison spurs division is minimizes specific racial inequities that exist and are being experienced within Black, LatinX, Native American, and Asian communities.

The decision of the past like adopting a color-blind ideology, have determined some of the conditions of today. Educators do not have to accept the impossibility of success in visioning society in the current state. Feelings of being deprived of power and influence teachers use pedagogies, curricula, and

teaching from text with the same biased. The oppression Olympics are on full display with concepts that enslave minds. Coupled with untreated traumas and ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences), magnify the unequal distribution of resources forcing situational poverty and unprofitable competition of the oppressed. Race plays a significant role in achievement and economic opportunities. Educators need to be brave enough to be the light when it is grey out. Having spaces for healthy conversations about race and the need to elevate student voices can no longer be avoided. Educators need to adopt the mindset of active listening because they must communicate to students what they are hearing matters, and there are actions that can be taken so that students can be humanized in society and schools.

Evidence is clear that teachers from any ethnicity, racial group, cultural background, demographic region can be successful teachers of any group of students. Nonetheless, educators must address the levels of discomfort with adult-student interactions about race. The need for psychological safety within learning environments is necessary. The desire to dismantle racism in schools garners a lot of attention. However, addressing certain race issues creates certain fears of retaliation or being overlooked for promotional opportunities. Perhaps learning environments should be structured in a way that is more uncomfortable to stay silent than it is to speak up. I know from previous work around Dialogical Epistemology Patricia H. Collins (1990) intersectionality, challenging the dominant ideologies from an object point of view, and using a multi-disciplinary approach has moved the work forward. She emphasizes that each group speaks from its own perspective through partial knowledge of perceived truth and “partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard; individuals and groups forwarding knowledge claims without owning their position are deemed less credible than those who do” (p. 236) However, a pressing question remains noted from the work of Tyrone C. Howard (2020), how do educators anchor their interrogations of racism in education?

This difference in perspective, reminds us to find ways to acknowledge the correlation between silence and microaggressions. This is not to say that teachers are not well-intentioned, but avoiding conversations about race does not show a willingness to embrace the new faces of America and the changing demographics. In addition, to engage in these important conversations, systemic structures must be called to task, and assumptions must be assessed, and participants have to presume positive intent so that when teachers engage in the necessary but uncomfortable conversations their communication is not perceived as racist. The capability to shift cultural perspective and adapt or bridge behavior to cultural commonality and difference is critical. Some of the empirical work examining race found that discrepancies between ability and achievement were attributed to socio-economic status, and it was discovered that teachers avoided evaluating race-related patterns in light of seeing clear evidence-based data regarding race (Rousseau & Tate, 2003). When experiencing the levels of persistent educational disparities, one would think that suppressing conversations about race only amplifies the issues and widens the achievement gap. If educational systems continue to utilize socio-economic status and consider poverty as a culture instead of a circumstance that can change over time with adequate support elevates adversity and traumatic experiences student encounter

while internalizing a negative self-concept. In my research the need to develop dialogue circles is important because educators have to differentiate between a “hand-out and a hand up.” Taking an approach to demonstrate the empathy quotient, educators will utilize their voices and engage in learning about various cultures through conversation while being reminded that intentionality does not mean compromising rigor or learning opportunity.

Change depends on Everyone

Teaching with the cultural eye (Irvine, 2003) allows the teacher to address any cultural misunderstanding within classrooms. Utilizing asset-based pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 2014) values the experiences, cultures, and communities that the students come from, which is a needed to change the deficit models that exist. Moreover, The Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineers (IISE) 2009, placed a profound value change and state:

Change is something that presses us out of our comfort zone. It is destiny-filtered, heart grown, faith built. Change is inequitable; not a respecter of persons. Change is for the better or for the worst, depending on where you view it. Change is a muscle that develops to abundantly enjoy the dynamics of the life set before us. Change calls own strength beyond anyone of us. Change pushes you to do your personal best. Change draws out those poised for a new way. Change doesn't look for a resting place; just the next launching point. Change is only a waste to those who don't learn from it. (IISE, What is Change?)

Helping with the creation of dialogue circles, Grant and Hill (2020) offer these goals:

- Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
- Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity, accurate language for human differences, and sincere, caring human connections.
- Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have the language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
- Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and discrimination. (p. 49)

Learning requires resolving conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world. Research suggests that programs should be designed in such a way that they are creative, interactive, relevant, student-centered, and group-based. Educators must spend a lot of time in making effective strategies for facilitating difficult dialogues. Effective Dialogues instructions facilitate feedback from learners, make learners ask questions, and broaden the learner horizon for the course content (White & Henderson, 2008).

Developing (CRT) Culturally Responsive Teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2014) teachers can provide students opportunities to think about what is happening in their local communities and to complete projects that address matters they can understand. Also, CRT suggests that:

- Teachers initiate student-teacher interaction, and has communication and technological skills to effectively implement distance education.
- Teachers construct student-centered learning with opportunities for interaction. Students are responsible for learning and responsible for contacting teachers when needed.
- Teachers give importance to the thoughts of students and promote student research, evaluation, discussion, and reporting.
- Teachers know student prerequisite skills and knowledge and use this foundation to build new knowledge. In addition, the teacher knows how the students can learn.
- Teachers provide prompt and accurate feedback to students to facilitate learning.

The Oppression Olympics is a race that no one wins, and educators must understand and believe that all children have the capacity to learn regardless of their gender, cultural background, race, or socioeconomic status. Lastly, Audre Lorde reminds us that “There is no Hierarchy of Oppression.” and teachers must continue to use effective questioning because it opens the door to possibilities. Critical race discussions are not just a one- time activity, it is a continuous process.

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