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DCDT Fast Facts: Teacher Hidden Bias

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Background

A chief barrier hindering the inclusive practices of students with disabilities, specifically those from culturally and linguistically diverse populations (CLD), is the attitude of teachers instructing them (Mullen, 2001). Particularly, these attitudes refer to the hidden biases teachers associate to this population. Research suggests both schools and cultures are becoming more diverse; however, the racial and ethnicity gap is widening relative to teacher (i.e., White) and student (e.g., Black, Native American, Latino) populations (Dingus, 2008; Philip, 2011; Shim, 2018) in the school environment. A substantial body of literature exists examining the impact of White educators' pedagogical practices perpetuating and supporting racial ideologies in their instruction (e.g., Galman, Pica-Smith, & Rosenberger, 2010; Picower, 2009). Therefore, a need exists for both pre-service, early-career, and veteran teachers to understand the "practical consequences of social, racial, economic and cultural hierarchies; concentrations of power and control; and oppression" (Shim, 2018, p. 127). Simply put, the internalized hidden biases of teachers are hindering the potential of students with disabilities from CLD populations. The purpose of this Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) Fast Facts is to illuminate a number of strategies to assist teachers of all backgrounds to overcome their hidden biases toward students with disabilities from CLD populations.

Key Terms

Culture: According to Hallahan, Kauffman, and Pullen (2019) the term culture has many definitions. Most definitions include (a) shared values and typical behavior, (b) commonly used languages or dialects, (c) known nonverbal communication and signals, (d) awareness of one's cultural identity, and (e) shared worldviews or general perspectives.

Subculture: Within any shared culture, there are multiple subcultures sharing common characteristics of the larger culture (Hallahan et al., 2019). For example, White culture and Black culture can be seen as subcultures of the United States even though the former is considered a majority and the latter, a minority population. Harry, Kalyanpur, & Day (1999) suggested individuals living their entire life within the dominant group or culture (i.e., White culture) tend to believe they 'have no culture.' To them, culture is a phenomena belonging to minority groups and populations. Individuals belonging to the group holding the dominant power (i.e., White individuals) tend to gravitate toward this way of thinking as they are not required to contrast, define, or explain themselves because those individuals belong to a group whose societal norms (i.e., ways and rules) are the given in the community in which they reside.

Multicultural Education: The purpose of multicultural education is for school systems and the curricula they utilize to provide equal opportunities to students regardless of their disability, ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, social class, or other identity related to their culture (Hallahan et al., 2019). Through effective multicultural education, the promotion of pride in students' own cultures and identities take place, while appreciation and understanding of cultures different from their own relative to their peers fosters into existence.

Cultural Reciprocity: Cultural reciprocity refers to the lively and shared discourse of knowledge, perspectives, and values between two or more individuals from differing cultural backgrounds (e.g., ethnic, racial, religious, socioeconomic; Lamont & Black-Branch, 1996). Because schools and cultures are becoming more diverse than ever before (Dingus, 2008; Philip, 2011; Shim, 2018), it is imperative teachers practice cultural reciprocity with their students with disabilities from CLD populations. However, cultural reciprocity between teacher and student cannot take place until self-reflection has occurred.

Bias: In general, bias is an inclination or prejudice for or against something or someone (Harry et al., 1999). Individuals may or may not be aware of their own biases when acting or interacting with others. In education settings, biases can be detrimental to student success and outcomes (Warikoo, Sinclair, Fei, & Jacoby-Senghor, 2016). For example, Warikoo et al. (2016) asserted inherent racial associations can impact student outcomes as they correspond with maladaptive feelings and behaviors that emerge during multicultural discourse.

Strategies/Recommendations

Self-Reflection on Culture:

- To become aware that you are, indeed, deeply-rooted within a culture, visit a community or society different from your own (Harry et al., 1999). Reflect on how and why your community/society is different if you are still within the same structure (e.g., state, country).
- Consider what do you value most in life and determine from where you derived these beliefs (Harry et al., 1999).
- Consider your cultural stance (Harry et al., 1999) and how that stance impacts your pedagogical practices when working with students with disabilities from CLD populations.

These questions may take time to address. Answers for them do not come easily or without prolonged consideration, but the acknowledgment of them as important questions to a teacher's ability to recognize and engage with differences is crucial. When teachers begin acknowledging who they are and develop a mindfulness of their cultural identity, they can begin to develop understanding, value highly, and welcome the diverse and multicultural makeup of their classroom students, specifically those with disabilities.

What to do about Cultural Reciprocity?

- Be open to taking risks and express, through open dialogue, the “nature and origin” of your thoughts and ambivalence with your colleagues (Lamont & Black-Branch, 1996) as it relates to your hidden biases towards those from CLD populations. Consider your environment and having this take place where all feel safe. In addition, engage with colleagues from different cultures and backgrounds from yourself.
 - Face-to-face or verbal forms of interaction are imperative. Lamont & Black-Branch (1996) suggested these forms of discourse are preferable to written communication, as behaviors relative to avoidance and denial are much more difficult during face-to-face or verbal encounters (e.g., discourse with a group of colleagues).

- Hand over some of your power, specifically your position power (e.g., your White privilege). White privilege is a social system working to benefit White individuals (Pulido, 2000). It is a belief the standard and opinions typically held by the White majority population are “correct” and therefore allow members of this group to naturally dominate social and political spheres whether or not they intend to (Hays & Change, 2003).
- Be open to listening to your colleagues from different cultures and backgrounds and consider and value their different views and perspectives in the context relative to their lived experience as it relates to their unique backgrounds and cultures.

As a teacher, it is imperative to practice lifelong learning. This requires you to be cognizant of your hidden biases, confident you can alter these hidden biases through dialogue and self-reflection with your peers and be open to the many changes a classroom of students with disabilities from CLD populations bring to your classroom setting, which may require you to alter the academic/functional instruction you implement (Lamont & Black-Branch, 1996).

Overcoming Bias:

- To overcome bias, teachers must recognize the experiential knowledge of their students from CLD backgrounds (Dixson & Anderson, 2018). This entails a paradigm shift where the teacher begins to appreciate the knowledge of their students and listens with intent, valuing the dialogue between them.
- Devine (WBUR, 2018) suggested thinking of biases as habits of mind. For example, nail biting is a habit that can be broken once an individual makes a conscious effort to stop. The same can be said for biases, if an individual makes a conscious effort to recognize and address biases, they can break the ‘habit’. Albeit, breaking a nail biting habit is much easier, but both can be done.

Website/Resources

Project Implicit

- Project Implicit investigates the thoughts and feelings of individuals outside of their active awareness by offering a multitude of tests in three areas: (a) social attitudes, (b) mental health, and (c) featured task. The social attitudes assessments measures implicit associations as it relates to race, gender, sexual orientation, and other topics. The mental health assessment measures implicit associations relative to self-esteem, anxiety, alcohol, and other topics. Finally, the featured task assessment measures implicit associations toward the Latino population.
 - Website: <https://www.projectimplicit.net>

Look Different

- A campaign to help open the eyes of all to hidden biases.
 - Website: <http://www.lookdifferent.org>

TED Talks

- Vernā Myers, a diversity advocate, examines the subconscious attitudes held toward CLD populations and provides concrete strategies on overcoming implicit bias.
 - Title: How to Overcome Our Biases? Walk Boldly Toward Them

- Website:
https://www.ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases_walk_boldly_toward_them?language=en
- The Black Lives Matter founders provide advice on how to intentionally participate to ensure the freedom for everybody--"sharpen each other, so that we all can rise."
 - Title: An Interview with the Founders of Black Lives Matter
 - Website:
https://www.ted.com/talks/alicia_garza_patrisse_cullors_and_opal_tometi_an_interview_with_the_founders_of_black_lives_matter
- Kimberlé Crenshaw proclaims to look boldly at the reality of gender and racial bias. She calls on all individuals to bear witness to this reality and speak up for victims of prejudice.
 - Title: The Urgency of Intersectionality
 - Website:
https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality
- David Williams presents evidence on how racism is producing a jagged system in society and provides examples of programs around the United States working to disassemble discrimination and prejudice.
 - Title: How Racism Makes Us Sick
 - Website:
https://www.ted.com/talks/david_r_williams_how_racism_makes_us_sick

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