

Running Head: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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EAD 850
1 February 2015

Introduction

Multicultural education is not simply curriculum, materials, or teaching styles; it is continual work that addresses discrimination and oppression towards Minoritized people (Gorski, 2010). Those of us working in education must self reflect on our own socialization into the institution of oppression as well as confront how current issues of oppression and racism also have strong historical roots (Harro, 2010; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002) illustrated how oppression and racism are historical yet we are still seeing their effects, and how oppression is normalized into society, institutions, and structures.

Oppression and Racism are Historical

Despite most mainstream beliefs, oppression and racism is not the work of one person or an individual's trait. Oppression is structural and historical, and it frequently "carries a strong connotation of conquest and colonial domination" (Young, 2010, p. 35). Whites frequently state that we are in a "post-racial" or "color-blind" society, and that racism is a thing of the past (Ferber, 2012). This belief minimizes the issues of racial injustice and implies that those who do not succeed fail because of their own fault or chosen differences (Ferber, 2012). Rather, oppression and racism has been built into our government, laws, and practices and it would take generations of to break this cycle of oppression that Whites have built (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Rabbit-Proof Fence (2002) illustrated the long lasting effect of damaging legislature and policies. The Aborigines Acts (1931) controlled every aspect of life for the Aborigines including the appointment of Neville as the legal guardian of half-castes. As the "protector," Neville had the right to remove any half-caste from their family and place them at Moor River Settlement. This is similar to the abduction and forced assimilation of the Lakota into Missionaries shown in *Red Cry* (2013). The policy of removing half-castes ended in 1970, yet Molly's life revolved around the legislation and she still does not know where her daughter is. This is an example of how her original identification of half-caste made her a "target" and she continues to be disenfranchised and victimized today, despite there being no current legislation keeping it that way (Harro, 2010a).

While the Aboriginal Acts are no longer in place, the oppression of Aborigines was the foundation of their economy and benefitted Whites at the exploitation of Aborigines for quite some time (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Young, 2010). The girls at Moor River were forced into training to fill economic roles such as sewing and housekeeping. This exploitation produced unequal benefits for future generations (Young, 2010).

The movie closed with the statement that, "Today many of these Aboriginal people continue to suffer from this destruction of identify, family life, and culture. We call them the Lost

Generations” (Noyce, 2002). Here we can see how even though a racist piece of legislation has ended, the damaging effects carry on for generations.

Oppression is Normalized

We are born into our social group, our culture, and this is the lens by which we identify race issues and how our involvement in oppressive institutions and structures is dictated (Ferber, 2012). We learn through school, family, experiences, that we are either members of the dominant, agent, group or we are members of the target, subordinate, group (Harro, 2010a). Our society measures norms based around the experience of the agent groups; thus what they do and believe becomes the basis for which other groups will be judged (Harro, 2010a). Racism then becomes normalized and embedded into society; racism permeates “everyday practices” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Young, 2010).

Rabbit-Proof Fence (2002) demonstrated how oppression is normalized into Australian institutions and legislation. An example of normalized violence is the police presence at the Jigalong camp (Young, 2010). At any moment, the women and children could have been attacked and abducted; this was typical practice by the Australian government when searching for half-castes. Another instance of normalized violence is the scene at Moor River when the girl was whipped and kept in a small shed for running away.

Neville’s attitude about the half-castes is not one of explicit racism or violence; he truly believed that he was “saving them from themselves” and that he was there to “help and encourage” the girls in “this new world” (Noyce, 2002). Neville had deficit notions of the Aboriginals and deemed their culture as inferior, what Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) explained as, “Cultural Deficit Theory.” Neville shared his views, the apparent “truths” of the time, through media such as conferences, meeting with staff and the students, and newspapers. We saw that these deficit views of the Aborigines had become the norm: the grooming of the girls by the staff at Moor River, the forced assimilation into Christian culture, and the restriction of speaking their Native language.

The “Tracker,” an Aborigine, is an example of the “double-consciousness” resulting from the normalization of cultural imperialism; he was expected to perform to the dominant, Australian culture’s norms, while maintaining some of his Aborigine norms (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 46). The Tracker had been “defined by two cultures” (Young, 2010) and thus it was expected that he act both as an employee of the racist Australian government, and as an Aborigine. We saw glimpses of his struggle with these dual roles in the scene where he asks to go home, but he is told his daughter will remain at camp. He also seemed to have some pity for the escaped girls while searching for them, but still must act as an employee of the camp and continue his search or he risked being punished.

Conclusion

Rabbit-Proof Fence (2002) illustrated that racial oppression is historical yet continues to permeate daily life and how oppressive behaviors quickly become normalized through opinions, legislation, and cultural imperialism leading to violence, personal, and group challenges for those Minoritized (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Young, 2010). These factors are crucial to consider when addressing multicultural education. We are not a post-racial society; there are norms and

history that must be addressed for us to move towards equity and social justice for Minoritized groups (Ferber, 2012). Without studying the history of power and addressing oppression, we as educators are only “reinforcing structural inequality by obscuring unequal power between groups” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 119). I do believe that educators can be agents of change by consciously identifying, challenging, and addressing issues of privilege, beliefs, and attitudes (Harro, 2010b). The challenge is getting (privileged) educators to recognize their place in oppressive structures and systems, what Harro (2010b) described as “waking up” (p. 54); an often difficult task to undertake when privilege and racism is difficult to identify when you are members of the “agent” group (Ferber, 2012; Harro, 2010a). Is liberation only an organic and personal experience, or can we teach people to “consciously dismantle” aspects of themselves (Harro, 2010b)?

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