Praxis Paper: Connecting Theory to Practice in Teaching Refugee Experiences

In the lesson plan “Connecting Theory to Practice in Teaching Refugee Experiences”,

An important purpose was to teach children what refugees go through in the real life and bridge theory to practice. We wanted to develop empathy and social justice among students. Drawing from the theoretical frameworks discussed in our course readings, particularly those addressing multicultural education and social justice, this praxis paper analyzes how these theories were integrated into the lesson plan. Our approach in this lesson plan is consistent with the principle of “backward design, ” “We start with a clear and detailed explanation of the desired learning outcomes or what we want the students to learn and then implement the curriculum and instructional strategies from the performances called for or implied in these learning outcomes", according to Cummins and Early (2015).

The lesson plan begins with examining students' prior knowledge and perceptions of refugee experiences, which aligns with the tenets of multicultural education. By distributing entry cards and facilitating a discussion of students' responses, the lesson plan “capitalizes on the importance of recognizing and valuing diverse perspectives” (Banks, 2010). This initial activity sets the stage or prepares students for a deeper exploration of refugee experiences and displacement, emphasizing the need for an inclusive learning environment where all voices are heard and respected. “Theories of multimodality rest on the assumption that our engagement with the world is through the body: through sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, our brains and our cognitive processes. The body is central to how we make meaning in the world.” (Boyd and Brock's, 2015). In other words, Multimodality theories suggest that we understand the world through our senses and cognitive abilities, emphasizing the importance of our bodies in making sense of things.

Using visuals provides a real-world refugee crisis further extends the lesson's theoretical concept. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), “multicultural education should encompass not only content integration but also the use of diverse instructional materials and methods.” By prompting students to reflect on the emotions evoked by these images and connecting them to the novel's themes, the lesson plan promotes critical consciousness and encourages students to empathize with the plight of refugees globally. According to Herrell and Jordan (2020), “Visual scaffolding is an approach in which the language used in instruction is made more understandable by displaying drawings or photographs that allow students to connect spoken English words to visual images being displayed (p 38).”

During the reading aloud of Chapter 1, pauses for comprehension checks and reflection align with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). This approach scaffolds students' understanding, ensuring that they can engage meaningfully with the text while fostering collective learning and support. This practice overlaps with the “Collecting words,” which “helps children develop better speaking and writing vocabularies” and supports their understanding of the nuances of words that have the same or similar meanings.” (Herrell & Jordan, 2020, p. 52)

The post-reading discussion, improving on the characters' challenges and students' emotional responses, underscores the importance of empathy and social justice. By prompting students to consider the characters' experiences within the broader context of real-world injustices, “the lesson plan encourages critical reflection and action” (Gay, 2002).

In conclusion, the lesson plan effectively connects theory to practice by using principles of multicultural education, social justice, and cognitive development. By engaging students in activities that foster empathy, critical thinking, and advocacy, the lesson cultivates a deeper understanding of refugee experiences and encourages students to become agents of positive change in their communities.

References

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