

**\*\* *In what ways does the variable of socioeconomic status affect the classroom experiences and academic achievement of K-12 students?* \*\***

*Journal Component of Group Diversity Project*

**Variable** = Socioeconomic Status

**Reflection**

When our group had a discussion on socioeconomic status (SES), we came up with four different ways that SES affects the classroom experience: resources (or lack of), peer influences, family/community and teacher motivation and expectations. When SES is low, the student doesn't have resources, as well as the school. Resources for the student could range anywhere from clothes and food to school supplies, such as paper, pencils and calculators. Resources of the school could range anywhere from toilet paper to computers. I shared with my group, a scenario of a friend of mine who took a job at a Detroit elementary school and she had to bring toilet paper to school every day for the students. Basic needs/resources....without them, there is a huge impact on student learning in the classroom. As for peer influences, students from different SES status are often cruel to those of lower SES status. In Vgotsky's sociocultural perspective on learning, the social environment around the student has a big impact on learning and SES status would play a major role in this. As for family or community support, the lower the SES, the less support a student would receive. Support from the family and the community also impact student learning. And lastly, we discussed teacher motivation and expectations as impacted by SES. The teacher who has to come to work day after day with limited resources, as in the case of my friend who had to bring her own toilet paper, will eventually lose motivation to come to work every day. In addition, studies have shown that teachers have lower expectations for students of lower SES status. In my opinion, this is the most difficult variable to deal with in the learning environment and also the one with the most potential to have a negative impact on learning.

**\*\* In what ways does the variable of race affect the classroom experiences and academic achievement of K-12 students? \*\***

*Journal Component of Group Diversity Project*

**Variable = Race**

**Reflection**

The words that stuck in my mind when we had our group discussion were “communication,” “fear of the unknown,” “stereotype threat,” “discrimination,” emotional,” and “commitment.” To me, all of these types of things are “controllable” aspects of human behavior. Unlike the variable of socioeconomic status, the variable of race should be an easy one to “fix,” shouldn’t it? So why has it been such a difficult one and such a controversial one for so long? Several members of the group, including me, felt that the race variable and the associated discrimination that often accompanies it has gotten better over the last decade or two. But maybe it hasn’t. In the book we are reading for FETE 201, Dreaming in Color, Living in Black and White, we read a story called “Black Codes” by Callie Miller. She speaks of the fact that “*the absence of overt hatred does not mean the absence of racism.*” Maybe the overt acts of hatred and discrimination are gone from the classroom, but maybe a more subtle form of racism exists. If this is the case, I think it will be a lot harder to eradicate.

Not too long ago, my son had an author visit to his school and assembly on her book, Am I a Color Too? This book was written by Nancy Vogel in response to grandson’s question to his “nana” ...”*Am I a color too?*” when students at his school talked about his black father and his white mother. Several times during the assembly, she had them repeat this passage from the book...”*I am a human being, not a color, not a word. I have my hopes and dreams and a voice that will be heard.*” Hopefully over time and more people in the school systems talking opening about all being “*humans*” instead of “*colors*” or “*racess*,” maybe even the subtle forms of racism will disappear. I hope so.

**\*\* In what ways does the variable of bilingualism affect the classroom experiences and academic achievement of K-12 students? \*\***

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**Variable** = Bilingualism

**Reflection**

The first word that comes to mind when I think about language and language differences, is “*barrier*.” If someone told me my next semester’s class would all be taught in “*Chinese*,” I would have to completely withdraw. How can a student who doesn’t understand the language that the subject matter is taught in benefit in any way from the class, especially, if the teacher/school doesn’t provide any scaffolds to assist the student in their learning? And knowing that by the year 2050, about one-fourth of the United States will be Latino and in all likelihood speaking Spanish as their main language, this is a serious issue for the United States education system.

Another significant issue associated with the increasing population of Latinos in the United States, is the “*stereotypes*” that surround those who have emigrated from another country, Mexico, to this country. This nation is in a serious debate about immigration and illegal immigrants and what to do about the situation. When we took our FETE 201 field trip to Westin International High School in Detroit, the assistant principal stated that a significant percentage of their Hispanic population were illegal citizens. Nowadays, many people just assume that if your native country is Mexico, then you are “*illegal*” and oftentimes, automatically harbor bad feelings toward that group.

The stereotypes associated with bilingualism also apply to different dialects. Recently, I read an article in the newspaper called “*Grand Valley State linguist listens to Yoopers’ talk, eh?*” This article talked about the stereotypes that exist WITHIN the state of Michigan between the dialects of the Lower Peninsula population and the Upper Peninsula population. This issue is not just between languages, but dialects as well.

**\*\* *In what ways does the variable of religion affect the classroom experiences and academic achievement of K-12 students?* \*\***

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**Variable** = Religion

**Reflection**

Religion....I thought this was going to be an easy variable to analyze and discuss. Separation of church and state...how much clearer could it get? Religion doesn't belong in the classroom, right? But what do you do as a teacher when a student says he/she need to miss midterm exams for a religious holiday, one of which that is not evenly remotely mainstream and you've never even heard of before? And what do you do as an administrator, when a student ignores the dress code because of religious dress or wears body covering veils (i.e. the "burqa")? Some countries, especially in Europe, have gone so far politically as to try and ban such dress because of the symbolism and association with a certain religion. In addition, after 9-11 in this country, there was a lot of negative discrimination and hatred that was directed toward the Muslim religion. How does this impact the classroom? I'm sure it permeates in many ways.

The issue gets even murkier when students advocate their right to free speech and their rights to pray in school. And what if students are given writing assignments and they chose to right about their religion?

It is my belief that public schools should not be promoting religious beliefs, but that schools should be respectful of individual's religious beliefs. I also feel that schools should teach awareness of different cultures and religions, but with equal weighting to each as to not appear to promote one as favorable over another. I also feel the religious education of students should be left up to that student's parents, families and religious communities.

**\*\* *In what ways does the variable of gender affect the classroom experiences and academic achievement of K-12 students? \*\****

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**Variable = Gender**

**Reflection**

Gender is an interesting one to discuss. No matter what anyone says....if you're in the classroom for any length of time, you know there are differences between boys and girls. No doubt about it. I run an after school math club for grades 3-5 and I have almost an even number of boys and girls. The program runs for 75 minutes after school, once a week, for eight weeks. Within 1-2 weeks, I knew ALL the boys' names; either because they were causing trouble and being disruptive or because they were "*dragging their chairs*" behind them with arms raised in enthusiasm to answer the questions. A lot of the girls are still "*nameless*" faces to me and I'm embarrassed at this point to ask them their names. *Educational Leadership* (Nov. 2004) stated that "*our schools fail to recognize and fulfill gender-specific needs.*" So how as teachers, do we overcome this?

In Sarah's research summaries, I found it interesting that a lot of her articles actually presented brain-based scientific data on the differences between boys and girls. The same *Educational Leadership* article mentioned above listed many differences in their brains from the "*hippocampus*" to the "*corpus callosum*" to the "*prefrontal cortex,*" all with very specific definitive differences in the male and female brains and the ways they process information and learn. But I think it was another point of Sarah's that really summed it up for me (from *Sex Roles*, Vol. 51, July 2004) ... "*Each student, whether they are male or female, experiences school in a different way and that's normal. The environment and the people are what determine if genders are being biased.*" It is the up to us as educators to ensure that each student, regardless of gender, receives the best education possible.