

### ***Critical Theory of Social Inequity***

In order to conceptualize the present state of social inequity, it is tantamount to understand the power systems behind oppression and marginalization in the United States. I believe that colonialism is the root of most oppression we see in the world today. Its legacy and present-day influence create division and hostility between the dominant hegemony and marginalized classes, seen in many societally prominent structures such as the American education system.

My conceptualization of colonialism's role in social inequity and education was largely shaped by two undergraduate courses I took at Clark University— *Global Issues in Education*, taught by Dr. Nigel Brissett, and *Culture, Language, and Education*, taught by Dr. Jie Park. Both classes focused on the impact of colonialism and capitalism upon different areas of education. *Global Issues* explored different dynamics within worldwide education, with significant focus on colonialism's influence on what is considered proper Westernized schooling. *Culture, Language, and Education* was also heavily intertwined with the impact of colonialism in the world of youth and education; placing concentration on the intersection between this, culture, and linguistics. Both of these classes provided me with new lenses through which to view my past experiences, as well as my present and future ones within the fields of youth work & education.

For an example of the consequences of colonialism, take the concept of cultural deprivation, often leaned upon in the world of education. This theory posits that people in lower socioeconomic classes have inferior abilities, knowledge, skills, and values compared to middle and upper-class individuals. It links cultural capital with success and long-term outcomes— especially within schools and educational settings— contributing to an often-accepted deficit view of children from marginalized groups, leading to dismissal of their culture and lived experiences.

The values of colonialism, as a power structure that puts Western and white identities above other social groups, both originated and presently sustains this view of cultural deprivation.

In order to effectively confront the consequences of colonialism, there must be a widespread shift *away* from viewing cultural differences as deficits and a shift *towards* community cultural wealth; a framework that explicitly rejects the deficit view in favor of seeing the unique knowledge, skills, and connections possessed by those in marginalized communities. When we begin understanding different lived experiences as positive and thought-provoking, the thought structures that prop up discrimination and deprivation theory begin to fall apart, leading to a more equitable and empathetic world.

### ***Theory of Social Change***

I believe that social change is accomplished through understanding of oneself and others applied in conjunction with community care. Through these processes, people are able to self-actualize and become changemakers, working with empathy and genuine investment in the well-being of others at the forefront of their actions. By meaningfully engaging in community, learning about one's neighbors, and caring enough to support them, change begins on a local scale. This ripples outwards to create large-scale and systemic impacts, resulting in social change at all levels. This is intertwined with my belief that a working familiarity with community cultural wealth is necessary in essentially every social, educational, and career-based setting. When one understands the merit that different identities and lived experiences bring to the table, they are able to situate their own identity in a community context, reject a culturally hegemonic deficit view of marginalized groups, and ultimately create actionable ways to right injustices;

keeping care for their community and value of diverse perspectives and stories top-of-mind throughout the changemaking process.

### ***Positionality and Identity in a Social Context***

In considering my positionality and identity, I find the metaphor of a phoropter most helpful for conceptualizing the way social locations shape our life experiences and outlook on the world. A phoropter is the binocular-looking machine you sit behind at the optometrist's office that layers different lenses on top of each other until you find the prescription that works for your eyes. I see each individual identity I possess as a different lens that shapes the way I think about certain issues or situations. Built upon each other, these identity-lenses form my "prescription," or my worldview and patterns of thinking, informed by complexities of all of my social positions. I am a white woman who comes from a middle-class background who has primarily worked with children in low-income and ethnically diverse urban areas, so maintaining an awareness of my positionality in the spaces I work within is critical to prioritizing respect and care for the populations I am most involved with.

After exploring my belief system around social identity and establishing *why* I see the world the way I do, I think it's important to consider *how* to reconcile my viewpoint with respect and recognition of experiences faced by people who do not share my identities. As a future children's librarian, I know that kids with all types of identities and worldviews will make use of the services in my library. It's my responsibility to create a space that recognizes, is conscious of, and builds a foundation of kindness and equity for each child's unique social location. I find reflexivity and prioritizing a habit of conscious reflection to be necessary components of maintaining a holistic, balanced, and socially aware way of thinking. Addressing the role of my

own identities in my role as a community educator through praxis-style reflection and reflexivity is something I have come to value greatly over the course of Praxis. I believe it has deepened my understanding of societal challenges outside the ones I have faced and better equipped me to provide resources for and connection with students experiencing life from an entirely different perspective. It seems to me that this is one of the great benefits of Praxis and its emphasis on reflection or turning the mirror back on oneself, so to speak. This process has given me actionable ways to confront my biases and preconceived notions in order to be a more grounded and empathetic student, educator, and person.