

Inquiry-Based Seminar

Applying Multiple Perceptual Frames for Educational Film Review

I. Purpose

The purpose of this inquiry-based seminar is to invite professional educators to apply varied theoretical frameworks (i.e., liberalism, post-modernism/post-structuralism, and post-colonialism) to analyze the subtext of an educational film: *Them and Us: Prejudice and Self-understanding* (Shrank, 2007). *Them and Us* aims to raise our awareness of the origin of prejudice and the construction of stereotypes. The film effectively unveils how culture shapes human mind and leads to polarized classifications of “them” and “us.” While the film can facilitate professional educators’ pursuit of self-understanding, it does not shed light on what Edward Said (2004) called “the normalized quiet of unseen power” that justifies, disseminates, and sustain prevalent prejudice and stereotypes. Thus, it is critical for professional educators to apply varied perceptual frames to analyze the underlying values scaffolding the production of the film. By applying varied perceptual frames to review educational films, professional educators will be able to gain a better understanding of the values and beliefs shaping their own pedagogical practice. Professional educators’ self-knowledge then can become the key to facilitating lifelong learning about cultural formation in the global age.

II. Learning Tasks

Task #1: Review the main perspectives of liberalism, post-modernism/post-structuralism (including queer theory), and post-colonialism (including critical race theory).

Task #2: Apply the aforementioned theoretical perspectives to analyze the text and subtext of *Them and Us*.

Task #3: Reflect on the individual-based analyses and collaborative inquiries into varied de-coding of the text and subtext of *Them and Us*.

III. Analysis & Reflection

To a large extent, professional educators are committed to pursuing justice for all. But, the attainment of “justice for all” is a formidable task. In particular, while we share common humanity, the collective “we” is comprised of “diverse” human beings. Very often, the public discourse on diversity tends to focus on group differences rather than individual differences, even when one can easily find differences between oneself and others within one’s group (e.g., family, ethnic community, religious organization, nation). In classroom settings, teachers, to a large extent, recognize differences and similarities among their students. However, their recognition of students’ differences and similarities often reflect their own cultural upbringings and pedagogical beliefs. Therefore, to pursue equity and excellence for all students, it is critical to go beyond the debate between a

“color blind” approach vs. a color-sensitive approach to construct a least restrictive and/or most facilitative learning environment for all students. To this end, it is helpful to undertake a critical inquiry into **what difference “differences” should make**. This collaborative project (within an inquiry-based seminar) is intended to be a catalyst to demystify the social construction of differences and similarities.

Reference

Said, E. (2004). *Humanism and democratic criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Shrank, J. (2007). *Them and us: Prejudice and self-understanding* [Motion picture]. Available from Learning Seed, Suite 301, 641 W. Lake St, Chicago IL 60661.