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Stuart Hall spoke in a lecture regarding representation and media that has brought a light to the various meanings of “representation.” The lecture begins with a clip showing black actors in roles that represented the life of what media portrayed as an average black server. The actor then begins to advertise the acting courses that instruct people can take to “act black.” This clip led into Hall’s main point, which is representation and how it is made up of many parts. Language and communication is a basis for meaning and representation, and representation is shown through meaning and absence.

Language and communication is the basis for representation. Hall states that the only way to know how people understand or make sense of the world is if it can be expressed or communicated (Hall, 1997, pp. 11). The languages we speak and write, electronic languages, digital languages, musical languages, facial gestures and expressions, body language, expression through clothing, and any other way to communicate a meaning influences representation (Hall, 1997, pp. 11). Language is a way to express to others how we make sense of representation. English has become one of the world’s most dominant languages and ways to communicate, and has been adopted in most classrooms. English has become the language most commonly spoken. This dominance of a language has threatened local cultures and languages (Spring, 2008, pp. 352). Oppressing local languages takes away meaning from communication for those who are being pushed to speak English. As the world adopts English as the global language, those who have family members who speak native languages express their desire to learn those languages so they may understand the “true name” for things (Willinsky, 1999, pp. 189). The true name gives meaning for the representation of something. The globalization of English has given way to the desire to join conversations and be heard. This desire alone has led to many languages being lost to English (Willinsky, 1999, pp. 190).

Hall states that the language of music is also a way to communicate and is a form of representation. Music is a language that can be expressed in various forms, and admission into musical programs across the country is becoming increasingly difficult. Students who do not speak the primary musical language will never be admitted to schools of music even though they are talented (Koza, 2008, pp. 149). Music is a language that is often considered “color blind,” but just as English has become the dominant language to communicate through words, whiteness and an English sound, has become the dominant voice in music. The representation of music is the sound of whiteness. Hall says, “without language, no representation; without language, no meaning” (Hall, 1997, pp.13).

Meaning and absence are important components of representation. Meaning manifests itself in what has become normal and what is “expected to be seen” in an image or event. There is just as much meaning in something that is present, as there is something that is not visible. Hall says, “*absence* means something and signifies as much as presence” (Hall, 1997, pp. 15). The idea that something that is absent holds just as much power as something that is present conveys the importance of silence. Native American students have shown silence in classrooms instead of speaking out and sharing their ideas in class (Pedro, 2015). Students are marginalized in classroom settings where English has taken over native languages and silences students. Students who speak native languages outside of school do not respond to discussions in class because they do not feel those who predominantly speak English will not respect their response.

The decision to enact silence for beneficial purposes in the classroom can be full of meaning (Pedro, 2015, pp.513). In this case, absence or silence, speaks just as loudly as a voice.

Another meaningful absence is that of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, other than English and white, within higher education. There is a hidden curriculum in higher education based upon white normalcy as professors and students (Gair and Mullins, 2001). The lack of students from minority cultures and ethnicities other than the dominant English speaking, white students, are not often found in a classroom setting in higher education. This absence has made an impact on the world of education. Pedro discussed the “danger in disregarding whose knowledges are highlighted, taught, and valued, and whose are neglected, silenced, and devalued” (Pedro, 2015, pp. 513). Western ideals have been globalized and white normalcy has taken over the classroom. This is dangerous to learning and cuts off meaning. Chung and Harrison go a step further in saying the lack of colored students in educational programs create an idea that they are not qualified for such programs (Chung and Harrison, 2015). Diversity in the classroom creates learning opportunities and perspectives that invite curiosity and motivation in learning.

Concepts Hall discussed in his lecture have affected my life. I have grown up in a predominantly English speaking culture, and the majority of my hometown is white. I never recognized how the globalization of English has affected those who speak English as a second language. Students in my high school learned Spanish, French, German, and Chinese for a second language. I chose to learn the language of Spanish for my language elective. I had the opportunity to study the Spanish language and some of the culture that is a part of it. While listening to Hall’s lecture and how language and communication affect representation I began to look back at my experiences of learning a new language. I have found myself understanding what it must be like to learn a new language and take on new meanings. Meaning changes as language changes. The way people communicate meanings is similar in the sense that they are using words to convey meaning, but the language is another matter. Grammar changes between languages, and representation changes.

In high school, my graduating class had 625 students and only three of the students were colored. I never realized the absence of colored students because I was in a town that was predominantly white and never thought twice about it. Once I got to college, I was the minority in most of my general education courses. My math courses were predominantly Indian and Asian, and my social studies courses (African Studies) were predominantly African American students. I had never felt like I had learned so much in a course until I participated in those classes. I was used to hearing perspectives similar to mine. I did not know the absence of voices of these students until their presence was known. Students predominantly spoke English in my high school and the only time a secondary language was spoken was in a “language class”. I had never thought about the absence of other languages since we spoke English in my core subject classes and spoke a chosen language in our “language classes”. Stuart Hall helped me to reflect on the presence of English in classrooms and the absence of other languages. I never had to think twice about what a teacher was saying because it was in my spoken language. I connected to students who speak native languages while I was learning Spanish. There are moments where meaning is lost and the absence of English makes it difficult to comprehend. Absence of non-dominant cultures, ethnicities, and languages affects meaning and representation of ideals in a classroom. [#1233]

Resources:

- Chung, J. Y., & Harrison, L. M. (2015). Toward an ethnic studies critique for teacher education. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 17(1), 4-12.
- Gair, M. & Mullins, G. (2001). Hiding in plain sight. In E. Margolis (Ed.) *The Hidden curriculum in higher education* (pp. 21-42). New York: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1997). Representation and the media. [PDF] Retrieved from <http://www.mediaed.org/transcripts/Stuart-Hall-Representation-and-the-Media-Transcript.pdf>
- Koza, J. E. (2008). Listening for whiteness: Hearing racial politics in undergraduate school music. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 16(2), 145-155.
- Pedro, T. S. (2015). Silence as weapons: Transformative praxis among Native American students in the urban southwest. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 48(4), 511-528.
- Spring, J. (2008). Research on globalization and education. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(2), 330-363
- Willinsky, J. (1999). Language, Nation and World (Ch. 8). In J. Willinsky, *Learning to divide the world* (pp. 189-212). Twin Cities: University of Minnesota press.