

Social Studies Perspective According to Greene

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Maxine Greene approaches pedagogy from an individual perspective that relates to the lives of others. She argues that there are only certain stories out there made by certain types of people. This poses the problem of how are students to relate to these levels of thinking or attitudes if they have not been exposed to it before. Greene also argues that there are boundaries for students and teachers that hinder learning and learning can only take place after these boundaries are broken down. As a teacher of social studies it is easy to see how these ideas relate to teaching within the field. Often teachers, especially in social studies, are limited to what they can teach and how they teach it. There is a limit on what can be taught also due to student prior knowledge or the lack of understanding because they have never experienced such events. Who writes the stories can also have an influence on what the students understand. Greene ties all these ideas together to demonstrate that there is a lack of compassionate teaching taking place and all of these things restrain the student from fully learning to their full potential.

Usually the stories in history are written from certain perspectives only. This is because in very early history it was only the white, educated people who could write down the encounters. This often equated to what the church acknowledged as true because they recorded many events that took place in the past. Also, the writers were often the victors of the event. In this case those victorious wrote how amazing they were and also destroyed existing records from the losing side. Greene believes that there are “anonymous ones who have established themselves in control.” (Greene, 46) Those in control were writing history from their point of view for a very long time. “They are the languages of domination, entitlement, and power; and there are terrible silences where ordinary human speech ought to be audible.” (Green, 47) These people do not give credit to other non-dominating sides to the story. This is particularly true for minority groups in history such as women, African Americans, and Hispanics. The same people Greene discusses are currently writing textbooks for all students. Up until recently, within the last maybe 50 years, there has been an increase in other perspectives added to textbooks in order to demonstrate other sides of the story. This is very important in the understanding of social studies.

In order to understand social studies there has to be a deeper understanding of what is going on. Greene comments that “it must be clear,...not explicable in terms of cause-and-effect connections.” (Greene, 47) Not everything in social studies is written in a clear black and white format. This creates problems especially for students who struggle to understand the purpose of an event or document. We as teachers of social studies have to give students the necessary tools in order to understand texts and documents presented to them in the history classrooms. It is important to “begin to shape our imagining by exploring more images from literature.” (Greene, 48) This will allow exposure to more information, more inquiry, and hopefully an outcome that ultimately allows students to understand many different sides to a historical event or story.

Lastly, in order for a full understanding of social studies, students must be able to tie in their personal experiences to the stories presented. Sometimes this is an easy task because the topic is so wide spread but other times it is harder to pull in a similar

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experience from the students. Greene suggests that the people who write are “surrounded by auras that distance it from lived experience, from the landscapes of our lives.” (Greene, 48) This suggests that the writing is so removed that it is hard for students to relate to what is being presented. It is our responsibility as teachers to remove the hidden “truth [that] is hidden but remains the possibility of meaning.” (Greene, 47) By giving tools to uncover this truth, students learning in social studies classrooms can orchestrate and understanding that is relatable to their personal lives.

Greene argues that pedagogy needs to enlighten students with tools that will help them see past the victorious writers in order to relate it to their lives. This is very true when studying social studies especially history. Often times, students take what is written as truth instead of questioning its worth or accuracy. By allowing students to gain new tools to question these things, it will be possible for them to learn a deeper meaning in social studies.