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EAD 850

2/22/14

To fully comprehend Stuart Hall's video on representation, I had to spend countless hours analyzing the video and corresponding transcript. I was searching for concepts from the video that would definitively link with *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire's End* (1998), written by John Willinsky. When I began to narrow down my options for this paper, two concepts on representation started to stand apart from the rest: those concepts were meaning as identification and meaning as interpretation.

Identification and interpretation of knowledge plays a vital role in what is culturally and socially discussed and relevant. Meaning and understanding stems from our upbringing, relationships, and worldviews. However, how does this tie into the idea Stuart Hall offers on representation? The focus of this paper will be to illustrate how identification and interpretation are demonstrated within the Hall's lecture as well as the above mentioned book. The essay will focus on identifying the concepts within: colonization and imperialism, museums, and school curriculum. The early portion of the analysis will deal with meaning as identification; the latter half of the analysis will shift the focus towards meaning as interpretation.

One of the key pieces I took from reviewing Hall's work was his understanding of the role identification has within media. His initial discussion on how advertisement aims to win customers over with identification was an idea I had previously learned. Companies want consumers to feel a kinship to the people or actions they are reading and viewing about. Yet, Hall took it a step further when he delved into meaning as identification as it pertains to the news. Images (at face value) do not contain meaning, he asserts, "but the meaning that you a spectator take, depends on that engagement – psychic, imaginary engagement – through the look with an investment in the image or involvement in what the image is saying or doing." It is the identification...the label we give to these images which leads us to place emphasis and emotions on issues around the world.

Identification has always been at the heart of cultural imperialism. Throughout history, civilizations have assembled themselves around race, gender, and religion to help form conceptual maps; in turn, these maps gave people the ability to make sense of the world. Forming a commonality with other members of their respective communities allowed them to categorize differences to decipher meaning. The interactions between the British and inhabitants of India in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century serve as an example of the importance of meaning as identification in representation.

Consider Warren Hastings, the first governor-general of British India in 1772 (Willinsky 40). Much like the British Empire as a collective, education and structure were concepts of identification that helped define the governor-general. Hastings had an appreciation for many aspects of the Indian culture; he could identify with many of their traditions and customs. The respect he had for the customs led him to make a concerted effort to show the people living in Britain that "the inhabitants of this land are not in a savage state" (Willinsky 41). The concepts

that defined William Hastings – structure, order, and education – were on full display with his interactions in India.

Not all aspects of colonial identification worked towards promoting true understanding and enlightenment between countries. A few years later, attempts were made to “categorize” the people of India to gain a better understanding of the country’s inner workings. As a result of reviewing this data, distinctions of caste and differences in religious ideology became more evident (Willinsky 43). This created a chasm within the country. The idea of meaning as identification was at the forefront of how Western Civilizations came to see the world - as an example of their own achievements (Willinsky 85).

During the video presentation, Hall made this statement: “There is no escape from the fact that meaning is, in the end, interpretation. It always shifts from one historical setting to another. It is contextual.” While meaning as identification plays a prominent role in representation, meaning as interpretation has a large effect on worldviews as well. *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire’s End* offers numerous examples of the role interpretation played during the early times of colonialism and imperialism.

One such example of would be the role Europeans felt they should uphold during times of conquest. The German thinker Johann Gottfried von Herder once advised European countries that “the barbarian rules by force; the cultivated conqueror teaches” (Willinsky 89). The role of the British Empire was not just to subjugate these new cultures. Rather, their role was to serve as a symbol of order and enlightenment. One way that Britain tried to interpret this viewpoint was to build colonial schools, which symbolized staying power (Willinsky 89).

Initial interpretations by Western Civilizations greatly affected dealings with new nations. Christopher Columbus – and his view of the New World – serves as strong referendum to this point. Upon meeting the inhabitants of what is now San Salvador, Columbus immediately interprets the natives as unintelligent and devoid of any particular religion (Willinsky 55). This interpretation leads him to entertain the notion of applying his meaning of identification (such as religious affiliation and dialect) to a group of people he has hardly interacted with.

Museums are another example of where meaning as interpretation can be viewed. An examination of the French’s feelings towards Egyptian relics is very telling. Upon conquering the land, the French became immediately smitten with the art and technology found within the country. They found Egypt theirs to appreciate, gather, showcase for all of Europe (Willinsky 45.) However, part of the reasoning behind moving these national treasures to museums in Paris was due to how the people of Egypt were viewed. They were judged “incapable of appreciating their country’s importance” (Willinsky 46).

Meaning as interpretation – within the context of representation – is an ongoing and evolving concept. The effects of interpretation can be seen centuries later by analyzing the quality and choice of textbooks given to students. Student curriculum lends itself to the same critical analysis as media; therefore, exploring who (and what) is being represented is essential when discussing the concept of meaning through interpretation.

Sources of contention within school curriculum stem from lack of validity and credibility as it pertains to different cultures. In reviewing American and Canadian biology textbooks in the

1980's for references to race, Willinsky noted that little mentioning of the topic. "Avoidance," he noted, "has long been the schools' response to controversy" (182). Avoidance (and neglect) of opposing viewpoints and cultures – done so to provide meaning for interpretation – widens the crevasse between cultures and races, and hinders universal understanding.

Textbooks – particularly history books – can offer a biased viewpoint. The interpretation of Britain as a "conquering hero" of primal nations lends gravitas to the "proof of an advanced civilization worthy of a global expansion" (Willinsky 120). Therein lays the danger of an unbalanced school curriculum: preferential treatment towards one country or issue can create gaps of misunderstanding about different nations and cultures.

Hall's discussion on representation would not be nearly as succinct without the concepts of meaning, through both identification and interpretation. We could not make sense of our world in any way, without the frame of reference afforded by these concepts. No matter what section of John Willinsky's book you are reading, one thing is constant. People have – and will continue to – derive meaning from identification and interpretation to categorize, prioritize, and organize what is important and valued in their lives. [1,250 words]

## Reference List

Willinsky, J. (1998). *Learning to divide the world: Education at empire's end*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.