

Teaching to Different Cultural or Diverse Ethnic Backgrounds

Culture Essay

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Every time I smile at a student I'm reminded of something my son said when he was fifteen. He said, "All teachers have a 'fake' teacher smile". When I asked him what he meant he described how he felt. He explained that when teachers smile at you without saying a word, they are really thinking negative connotations in their heads. He felt teachers, while smiling at him, actually were thinking, "Here comes that Indian trouble maker and I can't wait until he's out of here". I knew this wasn't one-hundred percent true for all his teachers but it bothered me that he felt that way.

I'm glad he told me. His comments gave me the drive to have an open mind when dealing with all students. I'm positive he yearned for teachers to get to know him and have an actual conversation with him about his interests, rather than just smile at him. He wanted to know that he mattered and was welcome in their classrooms. Since then, I have vowed to treat all students, whether African American, Euro-American, Latino, Asian or Native American as I would want my sons to be treated in a school environment. My strategy in my classroom will be to respect my student's cultures and values, display items that represent their cultures and likes, and assess them fairly. At the same time, I will have high expectations for my students.

Geneva Gay defines Culturally Responsive Teaching as: "using culture and experiences of different ethnic groups as a launch pad to teach more effectively" (Chinn 2000). First of all, if I don't know much about their culture I can't teach them correctly. Culture is much more than just people of color. According to Webb, Metha, and Jordan (2010), "Culture is defined as the behavioral patterns, ideas, values, attitudes, norms, religions and moral beliefs, customs, laws, languages, institutions, artifacts, and symbols characteristic of a given people at a given period of

time” (pp.213-214). Keeping this all in mind, teachers today have considerable amount of work on their hands.

Culture can shape a student’s behavior. Before I teach in a culturally responsive way, I have to educate myself about the different cultures and ethnic groups in my class. As well as learning the history of their cultures, I need to know some of their key life experiences as an individual and a group.

Some student’s native language may not be English. For the English Language Learners (ELL), concepts taught in English may not have a learning effect on them. I will find ways to connect with them by using materials from their language to help them grasp concepts. If their native language is still used at home, I will embrace that and incorporate it into parts of my daily instruction. Even if it is only a small part of my curriculum instruction, they will know I care.

On top of knowing my students as individuals and embracing their culture, I will need to create a classroom climate for learning that is welcoming to them. First, I have to make certain that each child’s culture is displayed somewhere throughout my classroom. If all my classroom decorations are from the same culture, students will assume that is the only culture that is welcomed in my classroom.

My walls will reflect the diversity of the classroom. Students need role models who look like them and who they can relate to. This includes role models from the same sex and not just the same ethnic background.

Icons from their likes in movies, music, and books should also be displayed. They need to feel they fit in and their like and interests are important to me too. I also have to find materials

that display the interests I have that will connect with the interests of the students. This way, we have something in common to talk about.

Once I have learned about the cultural backgrounds of my students and have created an environment that is comfortable to them, I can then decide how I am going to assess my students' learning. Some students may communicate better orally rather than written. This might have to be done individually or in small groups. I cannot evaluate all of my student's work in the same way.

The important thing to question is if they have learned the objective of the lesson. This can be done by formative assessment. Differentiation is just not for students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Summative assessments can be given in several different ways depending on student's learning styles.

I will scaffold around prior knowledge and teach to the needs of the group. I can build my lessons on student's strength. This will allow me to group students and work with them in small groups. If students know that I care and will not let them fail, they have a better chance at achieving academic success.

In conclusion, I feel I can be culturally sensitive to all my students by respecting their cultures, creating a comfortable climate in my classroom, and assessing all students of color fairly. I am ready to face the numerous challenges of having a classroom with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Currently, I have one bias. I am scared that I will favor the needs of my male students over the needs of my female students. That is something that should easily blow over if I stick to my values.



References

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