

CREATING GLOBALLY AWARE AND CULTURALLY SENSITIVE TEACHERS

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Abstract

*The teachers see **cultural** competence as both a moral and ethical responsibility to create a welcoming environment for students to succeed. The impact of having educators who have the ability to challenge and motivate diverse student populations can dramatically improve our educational system and student outcomes. The first teacher is mother. She plays the biggest role. In our culture ,the most important word is SANSKAR. Loosely translated it means the rules a family lives by.They are propogated by example and not by teaching.*

Having said that it doesn't mean that nothing can be done. A teacher , especially primary teacher ,plays a very important role in her students life. They look up to her as a God like figure whose word is final. I still remember going to sleep at 8 as decried by my teacher in class 1 and being highly uncomfortable n making my parents uncomfortable too if not able to do so!

A teacher can inculcate the right values of respecting ones parents and as a result ones culture and tradition as taught by them.

Keywords:- Multiculturalism, confrontational, responsiveness



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Introduction

Culture is central to learning. It plays a role not only in communicating and receiving information, but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals. A pedagogy that acknowledges, responds to, and celebrates fundamental cultures offers full, equitable access to education for students from all cultures.

Teacher Sensitivity is not about how “nice” or “caring” teachers are; rather, it is about how teachers consistently demonstrate awareness and responsiveness to children's current academic and emotional abilities and needs.”

When thinking about Teacher Sensitivity, it helps to understand how it plays out in our everyday lives. Throughout any given day, many opportunities present themselves (sometimes the smallest moments) to provide thoughtful and sensitive responses.”

“Teachers are sensitive when they consistently respond to students and are effective in addressing students’ questions, concerns, and needs. Teaching sensitively includes an awareness of individual students’ academic and social emotional needs in a way that allows

teachers to anticipate areas of difficulty and provide appropriate and effective learning opportunities and levels of support for all students in the classroom.”

Qualities of Culturally Sensitive Teachers

1. Get to know all your students as individuals.

I know that as good teachers, we all invest the time and effort to get to know our students. Relationships are the bedrock of good teaching in any classroom. This becomes even more important when teaching in a culturally diverse school.

Students have unique skills and experiences that can enrich your classroom culture. Take the time to understand what students value as well as their strengths and needs. Engage in conversations, give student surveys or ask questions on exit slips. Learn about hobbies and interests you can tap into when planning your lessons. It is important to make a strong effort to understand each student as a unique and complex individual, beyond his or her cultural identity. This will help you to create engaging lessons that can bridge cultural barriers.

2. Make sure your curriculum is culturally varied and relevant.

It is so common for art teachers to fall into the habit of focusing exclusively on western artists. Although Picasso, Van Gogh, Monet, Degas, and Rembrandt are wonderful artists, they are not the only group of artists students should be exposed to in art class.

After you have taken the time to get to know your students, it will be much easier to craft projects that connect to their identities and unique personal interests. With deep knowledge about your students, you will be able to present them with culturally relevant, engaging lessons.

For example, I had a student many years ago who’s family had emigrated from Afghanistan. When I taught my lesson about Mehndi designs that year, she was excited to see something from her home culture represented in my class. I will never forget her smile when she came to me after class to share her enthusiasm for the lesson. She felt so much more connected to the rest of the students after that experience. The rest of the class was able to understand her culture better as well.

In addition to providing your students with a range of experiences, make sure you do not pigeonhole the study of African American art to February, or Hispanic art to September. If you are committed to diversity and relevance, these lessons will naturally be spread to other times of the year when they are most meaningful.

3. Be aware of your own cultural biases.

As teachers, we set the tone for our classroom. We are responsible for defining what is embraced and encouraged. This is a big job and one that requires we be aware of any biases we may carry into our art rooms.

Ask yourself where you feel you need to grow in terms of your cultural sensitivity. Although this type of reflection is often uncomfortable, it is so important. Just as we expect our students to be open to discomfort as they learn, we as teachers need to do the same. Reflect openly and honestly, and make efforts to correct any cultural biases you find.

4. Seek input and support from community members.

Look around your school and community. Are there teachers or parents/guardians who would make great collaborators? Tap into the expertise of other members of your learning community to help you meet the needs of your diverse student population.

For example, is there a parent who would make a great guest speaker? Do you know a teacher who has lived in another country or has a deep understanding of a culture your class is studying? Ask them to share what they know with your students. These experiences will provide your students with deeper and more authentic learning than you may be able to provide yourself.

5. Make sure students have choice to create authentic work.

When students have choice, they feel validated and empowered to create. Allow students to use their own stories and experiences to make work that expresses their uniqueness. This will create the opportunity for your lessons to transcend cultural barriers.

As art teachers, we can play a key role in teaching our students cultural tolerance and understanding. When students are given the freedom to share their own perspectives, cultural barriers are broken and lines of communication are opened. Students have a lot to share and will be willing to if they are given a voice. Make sure your lessons allow space for students to be different from one another, and you will be amazed what will come out in their work.

Through art, people express their values, hopes, and aspirations. Art also highlights our shared humanity, which is more important for students to learn now than ever before. Our world is getting smaller every day, and our students will need to navigate through a more diverse cultural climate than previous generations.

Although it can be challenging to meet the needs of a culturally diverse population, there are many benefits. We art teachers have a unique opportunity to bring students together. These tips can help you create a classroom environment sensitive to students' cultural identities.

“Students make the most progress when learning opportunities are academically and developmentally appropriate and provide a reasonable level of challenge. In a classroom with a sensitive teacher, students learn to see that teacher as a source of support, guidance, and reassurance. Teaching sensitively helps students feel comfortable with sharing their ideas, taking risks, and challenging themselves academically and socially. It also allows students to work comfortably on their own and in groups because they know they can approach the teacher and he or she will be helpful.”

Urban classrooms can present many challenges for teachers due to many factors. Crosby (1999) reported “The new wave of immigrants of the past 25 years from Hispanic countries, from the Middle East, and from Asian countries has washed over the urban schools like a tidal wave bringing with it additional challenges, this time cultural and linguistic” (p.104). Gibbs & Huang (1998) state that , “In adolescents, school phobia or truancy may actually represent fear of a violent or chaotic school environment or fear of social rejection due to some cultural, racial, or economic difference from the majority of the student body” (p.17). The problem lies in the fact that most urban teachers are white, middle class and not familiar with issues of diversity and multiculturalism. Crosby (1999) indicated that “The teacher turnover rate in the urban schools, especially those in the inner cities, is often staffed largely by newly hired or uncertified teachers. These teachers, who were trained to teach students from middle class families and who often come from middle class families themselves, now find themselves engulfed by minority students, immigrants, and other students from low income families-students whose values and experiences are very different from their own” (p.302).

6. Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally sensitive teachers need to purposely respond to the needs of the many culturally and ethnically diverse students in their classrooms. Culturally responsive teaching includes implementing specifically student-oriented instructional processes as well as choosing and delivering ethnically and culturally relevant curricula. Culturally sensitive teachers use effective communication which may include translations to other languages in the case of English-Language Learners (ELL), and the use of audio-visual aids when working with ELL and Special Education Serviced Students (SESS). Culturally responsive teaching should include activities that reflect the students’ values, cultures, and beliefs.

7. Culturally Sensitive Classroom Management and Motivation

Culturally sensitive classroom management and motivation focuses on many teaching components, from the utilization of research-based pedagogical processes as well as the ability to respond appropriately to the cultural, ethnic, emotional, social, and cognitive needs of the students. To effectively manage the students the teacher must develop an inclusive classroom environment in which all the students agree to respect and collaborate with teachers and classmates for the benefit of the entire group in the pursuit of academic achievement. This is not an easy task, but rather a complex process that involves interpersonal, cultural and academic awareness of the student's lives.

8. The Quality of Caring

When students feel valued by their teachers, they are more likely to work harder at assignments and comply with classroom rules (Pigford, 2001). In his synthesis of research Davis (2003) identified four common aspects of positive student-teacher relationships: competence, autonomy, relatedness and involvement. Rothstein-Fish and Trumbull(2008) describe very similar characteristics: competence, autonomy, relatedness and generosity in the Circle of Courage aligned with a constructivist perspective.

Caring seems to be the most important factor contributing to positive teacher-student relationships which as been identified consistently through most research and academic literature on education. Caring is one of those elusive notions that is difficult to configure in concrete measured studies (Goldstein & Lake, 2000). In spite of this fact, it surfaces numerous times in the literature on multiculturalism (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2004; Zimmerman, 2000) as the most contributing factor in student's success in schools. In addition most popular teachers indicate that they care deeply about their students and feel passionate about the subject that they teach (Goldstein & Lake, 2000). Noddings (2000) is one of the most quoted proponents for an ethic of caring in schools, calling for a "dedicated drive to produce caring, competent, loving and lovable people" that guides the curriculum and "everything we do in schools" (pp.35-36).

9. Effective Communicators

Catt, Miller & Schallenkamp (2007), address how teachers should communicate with students to increase learning effectiveness. To be able to keep their multicultural students involved, culturally sensitive teachers must possess excellent communication skills. Action strategies to attain good results include: the use of appropriate examples, communicating why the topic is important, being well prepared before instruction, inviting guest speakers,

explaining the grading system to students and collaborating and brainstorming with colleagues.

Diverse students have differences in the way they process communications. Gay(2000) explains that African American students have a social interaction style referred to as "call response" in which students frequently speak while the teacher is speaking as a response to their feelings about a teacher's comments. They do not mean to be rude rather they are acknowledging or agreeing with what the teacher is saying. Asian students on the other hand may smile and laugh as a reaction to their confusion, and or misunderstanding the language or principle they are learning. According to Gay this is common among Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese and Cambodians who use ritualized laughter to maintain harmony and avoid challenging authority. Many Asian and Asian American students may reject praise, confrontational situations like correcting fellow students or responding competitively to save face, maintain harmony and modesty. English language learners who are recent immigrants for the most part remain quiet during class refusing to read out loud and choose not to respond to questions as they learn the English language.

Effective communication is accomplished by means of active listening (Bloom, 2008). Arcavi and Isoda (2007) define active listening as "giving careful attention to hearing what students say (and to see what they do), trying to understand it and its possible sources and entailments" (p.112). Gordon (2003) defines active listening as empathetic listening that allows the speaker to know that his or her message has been heard and understood. Furthermore Gordon identifies undesirable messages that can be communicated to students and refers to them as roadblocks to communication such as: unacceptance, inadequacies and faults, problem denial, and solving the problem for the student.

10. Hold High Expectations for All Students

According to Bloom, (2007) culturally sensitive teachers are aware of their expectations and how they influence their students. They use various authentic assessments to know where the students are academically, value each student's unique strengths, and involve all students in class projects and activities based on the students' interests. They encourage critical thinking in all their learners. There is constant use of sincere praise for their accomplishments and they let all their students know that their work and ideas are respected and appreciated.

11. Develop Positive Relationships with Students, Parents and Families

Culturally sensitive teachers know their students well. They gather information about their students lives both inside and outside the school. They learn about their students' cultures, past experiences and family. They strive to develop positive relationships with their students, their parents and families. Culturally sensitive teachers understand that cultural, linguistic and religious differences may prevent some parents from actively participating in school functions and activities yet they make an effort to help parents become effective partners in the education of their children. Maintaining a respectful communication with students their parents and family will contribute significantly to the students, academic and behavioral success.

12.Awareness of Socio-Cultural Differences of Their Students and Themselves

It is important to understand that one's thinking, behaving and being is determined by race, ethnicity, culture, language and social class. Culturally sensitive teachers have gained a lot of consciousness about their own socio-cultural identities and issues of inequalities that affect their students. Villegas and Lucas (2002) encourage teachers to critically examine themselves. Teachers need to reflect on and confront their own biases and discriminatory attitudes towards specific cultural groups. Respecting and celebrating the cultural differences of their students from diverse backgrounds will enable culturally sensitive teachers to work successfully in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.

Conclusion

A culturally-sensitive teacher is one that is aware of and addresses the students' cultural and ethnic needs as well as their social, emotional, and cognitive needs in order to obtain the students' cooperation.