

Amy Jacobs Culturally Relevant STEM Assignment #2: Cultural Analysis

I teach a third-grade gifted class within a Title-1, suburban elementary school. Our total school enrollment is 512. 75% of the student body is Hispanic, 16% are African American, and 9% White or other race. As a title one school, 69% of the students are low income. My most recent class consisted of 20 students: 9 girls and 11 boys. My class has 15 Hispanic, 1 African American, 2 White and 2 Multi-Racial students. Eleven students come from homes where Spanish is the primary language and five of them are specifically designated as English Language Learners.

Some of this information comes from the State school report card, and some of it is self-reported by parents when student enroll in classes. As a teacher, I always am interested in knowing the linguistic background of my students, in order to be able to better communicate with their families. In my specific school, we have various bilingual classrooms as well as a full time bilingual liaison in the school office. As someone who is not fluent in Spanish, I am able to utilize her skills to make parent phone calls, have classroom documents translated, and participate in parent-teacher conferences.

One of the first things I do in the beginning of the school year is to ask parents to complete a family interest inventory. I use a document which comes specifically from a handbook on gifted education, designed to help be gain a better understanding of each individual student, their family situation, and any elements of home life which might contribute to the success of students within the school setting. Some of the questions I routinely ask include: what language is spoken at home? Who should I contact and what language should I make contact in. What types of activities does your child like to do in their free time? Do you have access to the internet? Can you describe the space where you child will be able to do homework? Are you interested in volunteering in the classroom? What skills (academic and non-academic) would you like to come in and share with the class?

Within the classroom setting, I spend time working with students on identifying their own learning styles and interests. In addition to their home survey, I ask them questions about their interests, what their strengths are and the way in which they think they best learn. By giving my students more autonomy over their learning, they are more successful. I use the information provided to me by parents and students to help organize the way in which I structure my classroom.

Academically, I consistently look for books which are representative of my students and which are high interest. Students may be more interested in learning science and nutrition when the

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topic is paired with a novel, such as *Esperanza Rising*, rather than a textbook with lists of fruits and vegetables. I structure my math and science lessons in such a way that they cover topics which are relevant to the student's lives. For example, while working on science curriculum to fit the NGSS 5-PS1 standards, which focus on states of matter, my team and I tried to come up with activities which would show non-reversible changes of matter and chemical change. We focused on using food as a vehicle through which to channel this topic—the non-reversible changes which occur as food is prepared and cooked. We received food donations from families, had several parents who are excellent chefs come in and help the students work on designing their own menu items which included foods utilizing solids, liquids and gases. By making it relevant and yummy for the students, they were able to see connections to their own lives and also learn about menu planning!

One of my academic goals has been to become more familiar with Spanish language. I teach a language arts and grammar curriculum which focuses on roots and stem words, including scientific roots and stems. One of the things which I have made a big point of stressing is the cognates and connections between Latin roots and Spanish language.

In my classroom we do a daily class meeting. I have done this for the past three years and have found that it helps build community within my classroom, and it also helps let me know what is going on with individual students and in their homes. For most students, this meeting provides an opportunity to share information with the class and build relationships, but for some students, it is too daunting to speak in front of large groups, especially in the beginning. For those students, individual conferences would be the way to go.