

# **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in the STEM Classroom**

## **Course Reflection**

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I feel this class was very beneficial to me to take as summer coursework because it allowed me to reflect on my experiences with my students from the past and begin to think of the personal needs and challenges my future students are facing, often in everyday life. For many of these students, these non-school factors are compounded by barriers academically and socially within the walls of the classroom and exponentially within the school setting (hallways, cafeteria, recess, locker room, and on the bus). This class made me especially aware of my role to make learning and my classroom safe and equitable for all students that walk through my door.

As educators, we are so inundated with content we must navigate through within a given timeframe, assessment scores, and the squeaky wheels that get the grease (providing further rigor for high achievers and trying to keep problematic students engaged), I often times feel as though the students that fall in the middle don't receive the attention, recognition, and time to meet their cultural and personal needs. This course has raised my attention and my perception to focus more on the middle of the road students. Even though, they may listen in class, get along well with others, do their work on time, achieve proficiency in assessments, they may very well belong to a subculture group that could either reach a higher level of learning, or really be needing someone to give them attention or an extra resource to help them through another aspect in their lives they may be facing.

Some changes I will be making to better support a more culturally relevant classroom is by using the data and evidence that I have collected in this class to better support my personal pedagogy and the needs of my students in the means of adapting delivery of content, learning groups, and formative and summative assessments, especially when driven by administrative decisions that I don't feel is best practice for my students. The other change I will be making is thinking more critically regarding assigning small groups. This is a task that is necessary for a culturally responsive classroom setting and one I feel is not set in stone for best methods of delegating. To date, I have assigned groups according to personality types, achievement, gender, random selection, and student selected. I still do not know what is best for my students, but I am planning on taking better notes and being more

cognitively aware of subcultures and when students are being shut down or thriving.

One suggestion I would like to see added to this class if it exists or possibly as a discussion post would be either activities or resources educators use to discover the unique cultures of their students, the needs of their students, and furthermore, resources or activities to help students become more aware of the challenges they face and ways to cope with difference, strategies of working through different cultural perspectives amongst each other, and just being aware of what can help them become better learners when dealing with non-school factors.

In closing, as I was unpacking my boxes from my move last night, I came across a book my third-graders made me when I was student teaching (scary though is that those third-graders are now getting their licenses). The book was titled "Our Advice to a Grown-up, Mr. H" where each student gave me a piece of advice along with illustration! As I reflected on my third-grade student teaching experience, I always say, third-grade is the last year of school where a student can give a presentation in front of their peers, pick their nose the entire time, and have their class-mates think none-the-less of them and even high five them a great job when finished! Reading through some of the student's advice, this is something that I have never done with my students but thought this would be a great beginning of the year activity to help meet the cultural needs of my students, or at the end of the year, a great way to have students give advice to next year students. Here are some of my favorite pieces of advice:

"Whenever in doubt, keep hope." -Caden (Illustration shows student standing on the desk!)

"Try not to yell at your students no matter how naughty they are." -Nick

"Along with math, vocabulary, and science, a long chat with students is always good!" -Kayla

"If you need to talk to someone, do it in private." -Paris

"Never just give the answers, just help them figure it out." -Alan

"Learning can be loud, make sure to listen to kids." -Stephanie

"Stand out to keep our attention." Brody (Teacher standing on the desk!)

"The smallest kids like the grossest, dirty, and real teaching!" Brennan

"Call on all students, even ones who are quiet, like me." Brenna

"Always give kids time to do stuff right." Diana

Reading each student's comment, made me remember each student personally and many of the cultural differences each student worked through that year. It made me remember sometimes it is not about the big picture but about a single moment that makes an impact on our students lives that they will never forget, or an impact on our lives that we will never forget why we chose to be teachers.

Thank you, Anna, for a great and meaningful class!

Jason