

Cultural Analysis Plan

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Culturally Responsive Teaching and NGSS Science for All

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My first teaching job was in my old high school. I literally had been in my students' seats less than a decade before. Some of my classmates were my students' siblings. I knew their culture because it was my own. This didn't stop them from telling me that I just didn't understand what it was like being a kid "these days." No matter what a teacher thinks they know about their students, the choice to listen to the students and allow them to express their culture will build better relationships and lead to better learning.

As a science teacher, my first instinct is to ask students to leave conflicts around race, class, gender, and culture at the door. In my classroom we are all equal. In my classroom we are all made of the same atoms and molecules; we all have DNA that is more similar to that of our fellow humans than to any other living thing. But I know that if I ask students to leave differences at the door I am asking them to leave parts of themselves there too. Many of the discussions around race and culture in the secondary classroom seem directed by and for social student and language arts teachers. There is not a place in the science curriculum for interviewing family members about holiday traditions or writing reflective poems about identity. I have begun to learn about my students' identities by leaving space for conversation. Despite the ever looming pacing guide, there is time for questions like "How was your weekend?" and "What are you reading?" In those conversations I learned how one student's Indian grandmother made Masala chai, how another was meeting grandparents for the first time because they were finally able to visit from Central America, and how a third was bold and brash on social media where adults weren't watching despite being quiet, respectful, and studious in the classroom.

My plan this year is to invite families into conversation by assigning Keeley probes as family homework. The probes present a phenomenon and then list the explanations given by different fictional witnesses. Students are asked to choose which explanation they agree with

and say why. In the classroom this is done at the beginning of the unit, without giving the correct answer, and then students revisit their answers toward the end of the unit to see how their thinking has changed. Next week I will assign a probe as homework for them to discuss with their family. Students will share the probe, and record the responses from their family members. I hope the conversations will trigger sharing within families and that students will then be able to share some of their family stories with the class as well. This will help connect what we do in class with their family stories, and move my understanding of their culture from side conversations to something more meaningful.

I used to say “We are more alike than we are different.” I still believe that’s true, but now I add “We come from different cultures and have different experiences but we are all human.”