

Multicultural Perspective

EDU372: Educational Psychology

Multicultural Perspective

Today's world contains such a wide range of cultures all living and working together, side by side. Within any classroom, you will find a melting pot of beliefs, cultures, and races, all going about their day and living their lives, as one, in school, often not realizing how different each of their lives are on a day to day basis than their neighbors. Embracing each culture and allowing the children in the classroom to share where they come from in unique ways allows every one of their peers, as well as their teacher(s), to understand and gain a strong grip on the unique individual they are, while at the same time giving that student the time to shine and to be proud of their culture.

The Common Core standard covered for the following lesson is [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7](#): Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts, which can be found at <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/6-8/7/>. The learning activity chosen for 6th grade students is a short essay and poster board project that each student will create about their ancestors, culture, and where they/their family came from. The students will be able to be as creative as possible, using magazine cut-outs, photographs, and other materials that represent their culture/heritage to share with the class, in order for the entire class to gain a well-rounded vision of what their home is like, how they celebrate holidays or traditions in their families, and other unique factors that contribute to their individuality. The students' essays will not only discuss their personal lives currently, but will incorporate their ancestor's lives and traditions as well, as the children will have to do some research dating a hundred or so years back, to gain that understanding of how they got where they are today.

This learning activity definitely meets each element of multicultural education in a number of ways. The first element, *Integration of content*, is solid in this activity, in that the activity itself integrates the content of each individual student's culture and background. Each student must come up with a two to three page essay on the history of their family, including country, languages spoken, traditions celebrated, holidays, and so on, leading up to what is still celebrated today and any unique aspects from their lives they wish to share with the class, including visuals on a poster board or other materials brought in that represent their culture. In watching each student's presentation, the class will gain a deeper respect for each student and his/her culture and where they came from, and gain knowledge of the many different cultures represented as well.

This learning activity *reduces prejudice* by opening the doors to understanding and throwing out ignorance. This activity shows the students within the classroom the many dimensional aspects of their fellow classmates' lives and the interesting ways in which they live those lives, including how past generations lived their lives as well. Prejudice is often caused from misunderstanding and assumption, so by taking away that misunderstanding – that ignorance – and allowing culture, race, and heritage to have a voice, we are knocking on the door to appreciation and understanding, thus allowing connection between humans to take place where there once may not have been because of all that previous negative energy.

This learning activity *makes teaching equitable* in that the teacher will be bringing many cultures, language, races, and ethnicities to the table. Introducing this activity to the students by showing them a slide show and/or video of many different ways people across the globe do things, whether it is eating different foods or celebrating holidays we may have never heard of in the United States, will help to perk the students up as it helps them become interested and

educated in other cultures across the world and opens the door for them to share with their peers their personal lives and backgrounds. By having an exciting, interesting, and informative approach to introducing these different cultures, it will make the learning activity more fun and engaging, causing the students to truly gain a full interest in their peers and other cultures, thus reaching the goal to "...provide each child with the greatest probability of achieving at the highest potential level" (LeFrancois, 2011, sec.4, p.5).

This learning activity *empowers the learners* in a huge way, in that it allows them to be loud and proud of where they came from and who they are as a unique individual. This activity will open up doors among the student to student relationships as well as the student to teacher relationships like no other lesson before, as it is essentially allowing the students to put it all out there, so to speak, and proudly talk about their heritage and everything that makes them...them! In providing the students this opportunity, their confidence and pride in themselves will rise and new relationships will form, as taboo subjects are talked about and being understood throughout the classroom, all while the students are learning important information; true human connections and experiences are had by all.

Finally, this learning activity fulfills the *Construction of Knowledge* element within the multicultural education classroom by having the students hear all about their peers' backgrounds as well as hearing their essays on their cultures and histories from a more historical perspective, so that the listeners – the students' peers – are getting a well-rounded view of their fellow student's lives and family backgrounds along with the textbook/third party response and perspective. It is always important to gain a first-hand, human-experience understanding of a topic as well as a textbook understanding to get the full picture and deeper meaning of each culture's ways of life. By having the students gain all of this new perspective and well-rounded

view, they will be able to “...understand how knowledge and beliefs are influenced by cultures (and by social class and language)” (LeFrancois, 2011, sec.4, p.5).

Looking back at my personal experience in school, it was fairly taboo to talk about one's beliefs and culture. I do not remember anyone having presentations or discussing different traditions apart from the usual history lesson where we read about and wrote short answers and papers about the Native Americans and Christopher Columbus, or Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement. We discussed these things in class as if they happened long ago and were not still alive and well in our society today – as if culture was a thing of the past and we were all one culture now. I remember it being odd to me that it seemed as if everyone stepped on egg shells when it came to discussing culture and heritage, as it was never deepened or expanded upon on a personal level with each student. We talked about the past, wrote about what we learned, and moved on.

Factors that may have contributed to the exclusion of the multicultural classroom when I was growing up include the fact that teachers back then, and even to this day, are simply not educated enough on how to handle such diversity within a classroom setting, which often leads to ignoring it altogether. Although year after year it has become a big goal of many universities to teach future educators more and more on the importance of multicultural education classrooms, only about 45% of preparation programs for teachers include only one multicultural education course, which is clearly a problem (Schellen & King, 2014). Had universities gotten on the foresight bandwagon, they would have seen the very need for educating these new and old teachers alike the importance of teaching future generations with multicultural goggles on, and teaching tolerance and respect for everybody, no matter what religion, race, culture, and so on.

Had my teachers taught with an open heart and open mind, I would have understood my fellow classmates' culture much more clearly and would have had less judgement when it came to things like religions and different holidays celebrated that I knew nothing about at the time. Had the teacher assigned an assignment like the aforementioned lesson activity, I would have been able to feel proud of my ancestry and learned so much about my own culture and where I came from, while learning about my peers'. All in all, had my teachers made culture and heritage more of a priority among my peers and myself, I feel like there would have been a closer connection among all of us and the elephant in the room would have left, so to speak.

Because diversity is rising by the year, and each classroom becomes richer and richer with culture and unique personalities, the opportunity to learn about one another and our beautiful differences is multiplying immensely. As a teacher, taking the chance year after year to incorporate our differences into lesson plans is so vital to the classroom experience and, at this point in history, needs to be a requirement rather than an option. In order to boost student confidence and morale, as well as educate them on an entirely new level about culture, it is time that we, as teachers, help build up the next leaders of the world, come together, and uniformly agree that multicultural education within every classroom is a necessity for peace within the classroom, the world, and ourselves.

References

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