

My Philosophy of Diversity in Education/Embracing Diversity

When I decided to become an elementary/special education teacher, one of the ideas that most appealed to me was working with students of all ages and learning abilities. I've come to realize even more so now with the changing demographics in U.S. schools, how important it is for me as a future teacher to be able to embrace cultural differences within my classroom. I must have plans in place to educate my students on these differences. It is essential for all of my students to establish respectful relationships with other students in the classroom who may be different, and as the teacher, it is up to me to promote, support, and encourage positive relationships. By incorporating multicultural education into my curriculum, I am sending a positive message to my students that I care, and that I am willing to walk the extra mile to make them feel welcome in my classroom. There will be various ways students in my classroom are diverse, and I want to teach my students that we can all learn from one another. If I expect my students to respond in a positive manner regarding diversity, I need to be a role model and display characteristics of a culturally responsive teacher. These are the major areas that I will focus on to ensure my students receive the education that they rightfully deserve.

Establishing respectful relationships within my classroom is something I will make a priority from the first day of class until the last day of school. I want all of my students to be self-confident, have self-respect, and treat others respectfully as well. Everyone is different, and has so much to offer in their own way, and I want my students to learn to appreciate who they are, and to be proud of where they come from. My students will learn how to be sensitive and caring individuals, and in order for them to do this they need to be exposed to other cultures and differences. If children are not taught to be kind, considerate and caring to someone who is different, then it is impossible for them to know how to act or react to these differences. Engaging my students in "getting-to-know you" activities on the first day of class is a good ice breaker, and allows the students to tell a little bit about themselves and to share with their peers. In addition to having respectful relationships with their peers, I will incorporate multicultural education into my curriculum.

I will be very intentional about implementing and supplementing multicultural education into my curriculum. There are numerous ways to incorporate multicultural education into my lesson plans and curriculum, but one very instrumental way is having a collection of multicultural literature in my classroom library. The library will be an area where my students can go to explore books that discuss different topics dealing with diversity. One topic in particular that is rampant throughout many schools is bullying. I would specifically set aside some class time to discuss in detail this very serious and disturbing issue, and express to my students that this classroom is considered a non-bullying zone. I will not tolerate bullying or any other type of disrespect in my classroom whatsoever, and my students will know that I mean business when it comes to this type of inappropriate behavior. The goal of implementing diversity into the classroom curriculum is so my students know that differences exist, but differences are what make the world a better place. I want all of my students to feel as though they can voice their opinions and perspectives on any and all issues, and not feel as though they are speaking out of line. Giving my students the chance to have classroom discussions, will empower my students, and then they will realize that their opinion does matter. This type of dialogue will allow my students to become more confident and more aware at the same time. I will encourage my students to share their stories, and life experiences with their peers, so

everyone can learn and ask questions. Under a controlled and safe environment, the students can use their critical thinking skills to write papers or journals on subjects that are new to them. Activities will be strategically planned throughout the year where students can bring in artifacts or descriptive items from their home describing who they are, their culture, and how it has special meaning to them. Getting involved in a community service project is another way for the students to become familiar with diversity. A field trip to a museum would be a superb educational experience for the class to be involved in, and can be a great segue for future lessons in the classroom. In addition to supplementing my curriculum with multicultural lessons, the impact of having students from diverse backgrounds in my classroom can be a positive experience.

Knowing that my classroom will include a diverse group of students is something that I see as being a positive experience. Every one of my students is an individual, and each student has something special to offer, share, and contribute to the class. In order to make my classroom a community, instead of every student for themselves, it is important for my students to get to know one another. There will be students from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and different learning abilities, but the class can work together to succeed and learn. I will be compassionate to my student's differences and needs, but I will also challenge those students, and hold them accountable for doing the work. They may struggle with certain assignments, but I will be a visible teacher who is available to help them work through those specific problems. I have very high standards and expectations for myself, so I will expect nothing less from my students. When I give my student's an assignment, I will have clear instructions with explicit examples. I want to be sure to address all learning styles within my classroom. Some students may be visual learners, while others are auditory or kinesthetic. Diversity in the classroom comes in many forms. While recognizing the diversity of my students, I also need to be a culturally responsive teacher towards my students.

From the very first moment my students walk into my classroom on the first day of school, to the very last day of school, I want them to experience a feeling of warmth, comfort, belonging, and safety. As a culturally responsive teacher I have the power to insure that this happens, especially in my own classroom. Becoming more educated about different ethnic backgrounds and cultures is the first way that I can start to grow as a culturally responsive teacher. Getting to know my students, and their parents on an individual basis is also another way to discover the different cultures they come from, and a way to convey to my students that I genuinely care about them, and who they are as a student in my classroom. Expressing interest in their lives, and being available to listen and hear their stories will encourage my students to be proud of where they come from and who they are.

I am coming into the field of teaching at a very exciting time. There is never a time in my life where I can say that I am not constantly learning something fresh and new. Diversity is something that is relatively new to me, but something that I am anxiously willing to embrace and sink my teeth into so that I can be the type of teacher that all my students can look towards for guidance and support. Accepting all of my students for who they are and helping them grow, and learn to be the best that they can be is what I strive for as a future educator.