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Advocacy

With cultural diversity increasing in classrooms, it is an educator’s job to foster culturally inclusive classrooms designed to help every student to succeed. Our first step is to create that environment where the student’s differences are accepted and understood. An educator needs to consider all aspects that can influence a student’s perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. In research from Walden University (2021), common cultural differences include race, ethnicity, religion, language, economic, and LGBTQ.

There are many ways to foster cultural awareness and sensitivity in a classroom. One way is to express interest in diversity is by asking students to share their stories and relate their cultural experiences to the lessons. Students can create posters or art projects to share their stories. They can bring in items that can tell a story. Also, keep in mind educators need to remain sensitive to differences. For example, educators should not assume a student is lazy or do not have the ability to produce. Educator’s needs to understand what cultural differences may be influencing their learning habits or styles. That is when the educator needs to provide differentiation to accommodate their learning styles. Lastly, educators need to not just teach from the curriculum given. Educators needs to teach a broad curriculum that that captures the world in its whole. Doing this, can help students feel that their culture is of importance as well.

Educators can support cultural, linguistic, and religious needs by developing units or activities that speak to children’s interest and cultural background. This can be tricky in terms of following the school’s curriculum. One way to do this is to include and display diverse read aloud books that do align with the curriculum. It is important to choose text and excerpts that reflect diversity.

In my school, teachers have parent- engagement on Tuesday afternoons. Some Tuesday afternoons, teachers host workshops for parents to a part of their child’s academics. For example, some workshops show parents how students utilize online programs and how the programs are beneficial. Some other workshop examples show parents how to respond to reading questions and how to tackle skills pertaining to the unit. Aside from parent- engagement, our parent coordinator host events in our school for parents to join for arts and crafts. Our parent- teacher association gets a lot of support of families and volunteers to help during holiday festivities and fundraisers. When the school is allowing more visitors again, I think occasionally inviting parents into the classroom to see their child learn and to experience a lesson would make them feel welcomed and let them know their involvement is important to their child. It is important for our school to build a community within our school with families and make them feel welcomed.

For any in person conferences with parents, we assure parents that there will be translators for them if they need it. This made families whom did not speak English feel less hesitant meeting with their child’s teacher. Within our school, translators are assessable, but when we were having parent- teacher conferences at night, it was a struggle-finding translators, because there wasn’t enough translators for our large school building. Newsletters that are sent home are translated in different languages. We receive a survey of preferred languages from parents at the beginning of the year. Certain newsletters that go home are translated into the language that the parents prefer.

My ESL cooperating teacher is extremely passionate about teaching ENL students. She is a teacher who is patient and kind to all of her students and parents. She shared that immigrant parents are hesitant to be involved in their child’s academics, because they do not understand how to teach they child the way educators teach. There is the language barrier that also makes them feel hesitant and overwhelmed. Class Dojo has been a great communication tool with the teacher and parents, because of the translation option. She shared that it has made communicating with parents much easier and that they reach out to her more often that parents in the previous years. Some of the workshops she hosted were her modeling, examples of what students should be doing in certain content areas.

She shared with me that is tough being an ENL teacher to thirty students. She has to modify lessons daily. For the most part, her ELL students are engaged in the lessons. They show their eagerness to learn, especially when they make that connection and she sees the spark in their involvement. Some days are a struggle when her entering students say less than a handful of words to her, but what is rewarding, is her seeing progress.

For non- ESL educators, I would like them to know that you cannot just know a student based on their test data. You have to know what cultural differences may be influencing their learning styles and habits. Educators need to continue to modify their instruction that fits the needs of every individual. It is important for non- ESL educators to really know the importance of understanding the cultural background of their students. It can build a connection and relationship with the teacher and student, where it forms a trusting and nurturing learning environment. Teachers should also ensure diversity in represented in lesson planning. Regardless of the subject or content, educators needs to try to present and connect lessons to real world issues.

References:

Walden University. (2021, March 25). *Why Cultural Diversity and Awareness in the Classroom Is Important*. https://www.waldenu.edu/online-bachelors-programs/bs-in-elementary-education/resource/why-cultural-diversity-and-awareness-in-the-classroom-is-important

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