

Real World of Diversity: Creating Authentic Experiences to Support Diversity

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Abstract

Textbook ways of learning have been taught in the classroom for many years, often excluding diverse students and their unique experiences. Through personal experience in the classroom, we have considered the lack of authentic experiences and the diverse cultures and aim to combine these two concepts through the following research. We propose a curriculum that involves creating a collaborative project between two diverse student populated schools to make real connections and learn to appreciate the differences between each other.

Introduction

In today's public schools, there is a lack of real world experiences and diverse classrooms. Teachers and students suffer greatly when they do not experience authentic real world learning in a classroom that is intended to prepare them for the world outside of the classroom. Between both of our experiences in the classroom, we noticed the gap between finding what is essential for learning and the necessity of diversity. Together we made personal connections that ultimately inspired us to create a way to bridge the gap we face in schools today. Being from Italy, Giulia experienced a change in culture and was a part of a more diverse classroom from when she moved to the United States, because of that she started to realize the importance of a diverse classroom and the value that diversity has. While observing at a local high school, Erin felt there was a disconnect between how things are taught using textbooks versus how real life actually is.

Curriculum Solution

Typically, in rural suburban areas with small schools, the classrooms are predominantly filled with white students. In urban areas, the classrooms are most likely made up of African American and Latinx students. Although the classroom has come a long way in creating diverse environment, there is still a lack thereof across public schools. Outside of the classroom in the real world, diversity is everywhere. Diversity among students in education impacts their performance and enables them to push further when there are others with similar backgrounds

working alongside them (The Benefits of Diversity in Schools, 2020). It is important to expose students to diversity that way they are creating memorable experiences that they can take with them beyond schooling.

Experience is important for students to expand their horizons, not just in their personal lives, but for their academic futures as well (Pearce, 2016). As we looked deeper into each other's research we decided on a solution that we felt bridged the gap to the best of its ability. Our curriculum solution is to create a collaboration between two schools with diverse student populations to develop a bigger project. By building this collaboration, the students will have the opportunity to connect with peers from another school and gain an appreciation for the differences between each other.

Curriculum Rationale and Overview

The curriculum plan we propose aims to bring together students from different backgrounds and learn from one another. Friendship is an underlying factor, creating emotional support and validation. Considering the curriculum philosophy progressivism while we create this curriculum, we aim to evolve education and encourage growth and balance through inclusion. We believe this curriculum is important in creating bonds for real world relationships in and out of the classroom.

According to a study done by researchers from the University of California Los Angeles and the University of Groningen, Latinx and African American sixth graders from 10 urban American middle schools reported on how many same- and cross-ethnic friends they had, how vulnerable they felt, the quality of their friendships, and their ethnic identity. The results found that friendship levels increased as the diversity within the classrooms rose (Mandell, 2013). This study is an example of creating real world relationships and the importance of diverse

classrooms. We look to references such as this one to consider while we implement our curriculum.

Our curriculum is not the only one of its kind. We have found many districts have merged together and similarly done what we aim to do. Although some of these changes were done unwillingly by districts, the curriculum we propose will incorporate five phases to make this transition as smooth as possible. In the first phase we must build the trust of our students. Building an inclusive, honest, and positive relationship with the school and their students is important in transitioning this kind of curriculum. It is really important for the students and teachers to respect each other's and their peers (Franklin, 2001). In the second phase, building the educator's cultural competence is needed to form authentic and effective relationships across all differences. Caring and meaningful relationships between teachers and students influence achievement outcomes. In the third phase, educators directly confront the current and historical inequities that affect education. This phase is meant to form a compelling narrative that informs, inspires, and sustains educators in the work. In the fourth phase, transforming instructional practices changes the way we respond to diversity. Here teachers examine pedagogy and curriculum as well as expectations and interaction patterns with students. The final phase is done by engaging the entire school community. This is one of the most crucial parts in the curriculum (Howard, 2007, p. 16-22). It is important that when the students engage they also learn how to respect each other's background, no student should feel superior to another (Sloan, 2008).

The audience that we propose this curriculum ranges from rural and urban school districts that are looking towards creating a more diverse environment project. Diversity between schools can range from race to religion, ethnicity, culture and so much more. We estimate that the timeframe for this curriculum plan will last several months or a semester, depending on the

outcomes and implied projects. The overall curriculum is a collaboration project or an event that takes place between rural and urban schools that lack diversity in the student body to create a connection with the real-world community that surrounds the students. Creating a multicultural curriculum such as this one, we consider the importance of integrating classrooms. It enables students from diverse cultural backgrounds to learn how to rise above the cultural borders they face and engage in conversation and action with those who differ from them (Roux, 2007). The ultimate objective we wish to achieve is to bridge the gap public education holds which is a lack of authentic learning experiences and relationships that diversity provides into the classroom.

Curriculum in Practice and Assessment

In order for this posed curriculum to work, we must consider how it will be implemented. We intend on proposing this curriculum to the administration of two schools who fit demographically with our vision. In the process, a democratic relationship will be created to see how it will work, making sure all potential problems are solved and everything runs as smoothly as possible. Initially, we may begin by introducing subject matter of multicultural connections and bring that into the classroom and combine the classrooms. Depending on resources within each school, it may be done virtually or in person. From here a project or event will take place. The goal we seek is to create a work environment that will not shock the students but rather create a positive, uplifting activity that the students can take with them following their schooling.

The curriculum should start small. This may begin in the classroom following the approval from administration from both schools. Small group discussions in each classroom can start a conversation about expectations and how to combine the students together while also acknowledging their needs and concerns. This may include icebreakers and team bonding exercises. From here the curriculum will move a little broader. Community is an important piece

to touch on in these conversations. The students should be asked to consider their fellow peers and how important it is to get to know their neighbors in different communities. Understanding and discussing community is especially important for making the real-world connections in the classroom. Following these steps, the project or event will be carried out. It will be a collaborative activity that leaves an imprint for future classrooms to potentially follow through in the future. This could be a mural or a day dedicated to diversity and celebrating differences.

It is crucial to incorporate assessment of this particular curriculum. There are considerations that must be assessed. Some of these factors include: the parents of the children, the school's mission, the location of the schools, the effectiveness of the collaboration, and so on. We feel it is important to reflect on these factors in order to have an end result that is positive, beneficial, and inclusive for everyone. Creating these connections is important for growth not only academically, but personally.

Conclusion

As students age and develop throughout their academic career, it is important to acknowledge their needs and what is significant in their learning experiences. Exploring different cultures cannot be done solely by reading a textbook but experiencing it through the creation of real-world connections. In the education realm that can be done by opening up the classroom to others through art activities.

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