

**Effective Diversity Practices in the Classroom**

**By:**

**Regina Williams  
Teacher/LGHS**

## **Effective Diversity Practices in the Classroom**

Diversity, from a multicultural stance, deals with a broad band of differences in human beings in general. We know it to encompass the dimensions of ethnicity, race, gender, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, etc. I would like to approach diversity from the teacher's role of meeting the needs of the student and from a teacher's viewpoint of just *knowing* and *understanding* the student as a total person. In this sense, as a *unique individual* who brings with them a flavoring dimension of differences in the classroom.

The following components will be addressed as it relates to diversity in the classroom: (1) What Works in Diverse Classrooms, (2) Real Challenges in the Classroom, and (3) Managing and Inspiring Struggling Students.

### **What Works in a Diverse Classroom:**

Dealing with diversity in the classroom actually defines who you are as an individual first, and as an educator, second. I have come to realize that every student, regardless of origin or socio-economic status, is unique, talented, and skilled by their own given right. I have discovered that there are certain things that must take place in a diverse classroom that will make it a workable and warm environment.

First, we must embrace and celebrate diversity in the classroom by verbalizing and modeling to the student saying, "I appreciate you, I value you, and I respect you!" We must understand that students will have *differences* within same like *groups* and *cultures*, as well as cross ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. For the most part, students want to be appreciated, accepted, and respected. Students want nothing more than to be welcomed and accepted by their peers and teachers alike. The teacher must set the climate and the tone in order for this to take place within the classroom.

We must show genuine concern for each of the students one by one. We do this simply by establishing a sincere student- to- teacher relationship. The rapport starts at the beginning of the school year (or whenever you receive that student into your classroom), and it continues indefinitely. You immediately begin the rapport process, even if you only have the student for one semester, one year, or one week. As you walk around the classroom and observe your class daily, you may "spot" a student who appears to be happy, sad, and indifferent or out of touch. For an example, if a student appears to look sad, just stop by the student's desk and softly ask, "Are you okay? You look as though something is troubling you. If I can assist you, just let me know." You will be surprised how a student welcomes and appreciates your concern.

Secondly, transparency can become a teacher's best friend when used with common sense and in moderation. Wearing hats of humor, love, understanding, and patience in the classroom opens the door to the students understanding that teachers,

## **Effective Diversity Practices in the Classroom**

Page: 2

too, are human. We must not be so far removed from the classroom knowing that we, too, at some place and time have been where students are now sitting. When we understand these simple truths, we unlock the miscommunication doors and build a coalition of trust and commitment to students alike and unlike, something that is needed within a diverse classroom.

Thirdly, since we know that students bring a rainbow of uniqueness into the classroom, we must see diversity for what it is. *No two students learn the same and that's just the way it is!* We must bridge the gap in learning by letting the student know I'm Okay...You're Okay. It is my belief that the only formula in teaching and student learning is *knowing your student* and what *learning style* works effectively best for him or her. We are looking for miracles, and if I would be truthful to say, the miracles are not found on the outside.

I have learned that if you are called to the art and profession of teaching, the miracle is inside of *you*. Somehow, *you* and the *student* working together will just make it happen! The focus is always on the *student*; it should never be on the teacher. The finest educational institutions will theoretically prepare you for the teaching profession but it is the *passion* and the *love* for the profession that will sustain you! Teaching is a passion and it never becomes a chore. It is the teacher's passion within that helps unlock the right door for a student to *believe, achieve, and succeed!*

## **Real Challenges in the Classroom**

The first time I walked into a classroom setting was nearly 13 years ago. I was introduced to the art of teaching by working in a juvenile setting with adjudicated youth ranging from 14-21 years of age. I was told by the principal who hired me that if I could work five years in this "setting", I would be able to teach in any environment. He went on to say that the students that you will be teaching in this juvenile facility are from all walks of life and have made some poor choices; however, they are no *different* than any other youth or student that you will teach. His final thoughts were: *Be patient, nonjudgmental, passionate about teaching, have compassion and understanding, and listen to your students and respect them!!* After comparing apples and oranges, I have come to find out that he was absolutely correct!

If teaching is not your *passion*, this will become a real challenge for the new teacher or the veteran teacher. That's one strike against you already because you are not being true to yourself. The *inner drive* and the *passion* to teach is the premise for which all other foundations are built upon. So, if the love or passion for the profession is not there, that in itself becomes a challenge- knowing that you may find yourself in a place that you have no desire to be. Once you know you have answered to that true-passionate calling of teaching, you are in for a joy ride! Please note that I did not say you would not have any bumps along the way-of course you will. The passion within surpasses and heals all the bumps and bruises that you will encounter.

## **Effective Diversity Practices in the Classroom**

Page: 3

Throughout the past few years, I have taken my first principal's advice and listen to my students. It does not matter what I'm doing. I find a stopping point and give them my undivided attention. Teaching will become an easy task, especially when you see students who try to positively emulate what you have tried to model. The real challenges in the classroom come about when we do not listen, we pass judgment, we are not patient, and we show no compassion, respect, or understanding for the student.

### **Managing and Inspiring Struggling Students**

Every student wants to learn. Of course, they will not echo this, so the teacher must be wise enough to know this and invisibly see these inscribed words written upon the student's forehead: "*I want to learn.*" When that becomes your focus, you will see nothing else. Every student that walks into a classroom is a prospect for success, and that includes the struggling student who already has strikes against him or her.

The struggling student who may have reading limitations and lacks comprehension skills across the interdisciplinary areas should never be seen as a problem but as a *challenge!* When the student is treated or perceived as a problem by another, then that's what he or she becomes! Constant positive motivators are a **MUST!** The student needs to hear, "*I believe in you and I believe in you BIG. I will not let you fail; I just need for you to meet me half way.*" I read somewhere that the word *teacher* is a Latin term that means to lead or to draw out. It is my belief that those who are called to this profession of teaching have that innate ability to lead and draw out the *good* in a student.

Looking through the eyes of history, clothing, hair styles, and automobiles changes occur with the eras in time, but *students* have remained true to their identity. They are unique beings by their own human existence and they bring diversity into a classroom setting. Teachers who have a burning desire and a passion to teach have the ability to *lead* and *draw out* the good in a student. To teach one is to reach one.