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Abstract

Even from the time of preservice teachers, many educators are set in their ideas of teaching, usually based off of their experiences and attitudes. Most preservice teachers, when asked, want to teach in a school where they are not in the minority. However, as the country becomes more diverse, the population of teachers remains one-dimensional. There are an extremely large percentage of teachers that prefer to not teach in cities.

Teachers must make a shift out of their comfort zone if they are going to give true justice to their students with a multicultural experience. Attitudes must change. Things that they are used to must be looked upon with a new lens. It requires professional growth and a willingness to change and rethink their own norms and beliefs to become a good teacher and appreciator of multicultural literature.

The first step of embarking on this journey is for all teachers to discover their individual culture. After that step has been achieved, such as by writing a poem, “Where I’m From” and having others all share. Both the differences and similarities existing between different people present will create a better awareness and respect for multiculturalism.

A logical next step to an increased consciousness of multiculturalism is for the preservice teacher to become more exposed to other cultures, perhaps through the school they are placed in to teach, and to have interaction. This might help them to learn that although regularities within cultures are helpful, they are never to overgeneralize and place these patterns upon any student they may teach.

One attempt to expose preservice teachers to multiculturalism is immersion experiences as they can offer opportunities for that teacher to be in the minority which allows for new cultural knowledge and appreciation. This “culture shock” creates a stronger bond when similarities are discovered and the teacher learns and develops a broader idea about educating and treating children that are culturally different from them. The reason for this is it forces teachers to be in a new environment that causes them to question stereotypes.

A simpler alternative to immersion is setting up experiences for the teacher within their program at their university. Having them live through simulations and virtual encounters can have a similar effect to immersion.

After the exposure encounter, a deconstruction of reflection needs to occur in order to prevent the negative from becoming new biases and stereotypes. Some formats for this reflection could be discussion boards or journaling. This is usually followed by a “call to action” where there is a desire to spread the new cultural consciousness. This action is not one that can be completed once and then be done; having multicultural appreciation is an ongoing process that teachers must embrace.

Application

This article doesn’t work in my classroom as is for the obvious audience of preservice teachers; however this idea of creating a multicultural appreciation in the classroom could be applied. I see many students who have a closed-minded view of other cultures. Some of the strategies, such as virtual encounters, could be used in class to allow for authentic exposure for students to cultural diverse individuals. Then students could share and discuss their experiences learned from the virtual encounter with each other by digital discussion boards and journaling.

Although parts of this article are not practical for current teachers, portions of it could be applicable when looking at veteran teachers who want or need to make a change in their curriculum. This article would be interesting to present to teachers that have been teaching the same way for many years. These ideas could be used to enlighten these teachers and possibly present a new idea to their planning. I have noticed and heard stories of veteran teachers looking down upon new teachers’ new twists to teaching, and they only do the same things they’ve done for years. Perhaps teachers who are set in their ways might enjoy a new appreciation for cultural diversity in their own classroom. These teachers could be exposed to new respects for different cultures by going to conferences of culturally diverse authors or having a virtual encounter experience.

Discussion Question: Targeting preservice teachers to achieve an appreciation of multiculturalism is a great idea to create more cultural appreciative educators. However, what is the solution for targeting the majority population of culturally closed-minded individuals who are set in their ways?