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*Journey toward Multiculturalism*

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Teaching in a school that is ninety-nine percent white, Poole looks for a way to expose his students to other cultures. As he listens to an African American speaker talk about Huck Finn, Poole realizes that his students are extremely narrow-minded regarding other cultures. To further validate the need to help his students broaden their understanding of other ethnicities and races, Poole encountered a member of a hate group in one of his ninth-grade classes and found a flier from a white supremacist group on his car. Undeterred, the teacher presented the class with a three part assignment, which he hoped would open their eyes to the differences around them.

Putting the students into groups of two or three, he presented them with a three part assignment. The first part of the assignment was to read multicultural literature. Next, the students were to listen to guest speakers from other ethnic groups. Finally, they were to report on their experiences. Even though the students picked literature that should have interested them, because they had no framework in which to place the poems and short stories, they had no connections with the information and, thus, did not enjoy the works.

With the help of outside mentors, Poole decided that the students would benefit more with one-on-one interaction with people in the community. Met with resistance at the beginning, Pole convinced the students to try this approach. After the interviews were completed, the students shared their experiences. Every student who participated gained insight from the experience, even the student who was reluctant to interview someone she didn’t know. While Lindsay, the reluctant student, did not contribute to the class discussion, she did share her feelings on paper. She wrote about interviewing woman whose father was a German concentration camp guard. Lindsay’s reaction in her essay was much the same as the other students’ verbalizations. She said that she never realized her insensitivity to other races and became aware of them through this process.

The students were able to share their findings in any manner they chose. Some students made a music video and other students had their interviewees speak to the class. The results were more than the teacher expected. He realized that students learn more not only by being actively engaged, but also by understanding the different cultures of the literature they read.

While in theory, it would be extremely beneficial for students to pick their own literature and interview someone with a background or ethnicity with which the students are unfamiliar; in reality, with a classroom of 33 students and the world in which we live, this exercise would be extremely difficult. The author’s point of the students not being familiar with cultures outside their own is valid, along with the need to expand their knowledge of other groups. Finding a way to do this would benefit everyone. Being sensitive to other cultures is not something that I conscientiously think about in the classroom but, at the same time, not something I ignore. It never occurred to me, however, that some students could not relate well to the literature because it was not about their cultures.

How can I, as a teacher, make sure that my students are given more opportunities to learn about other cultures in a way that is both meaningful and appropriate with a classroom of 33 students and standards that must be met?