

Diversity and learning

Education



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Most developed nations of the world are increasingly becoming culturally diverse. This is especially so in America which is known as a nation of immigrants. Besides, as a powerful, developed nation its educational institutions attract the best talent from all over the world. Today people from diverse backgrounds are American citizens. It has therefore become necessary to understand these diverse cultures, establish relationships with people from different cultures and strengthen ties with culturally diverse people in order to build communities that are sensitive to and have the ability to solve problems and improve conditions for all the people of the community. This integration can begin early at the school level where interaction with children of different colors, races and speaking different languages teach them to accept these differences and to take the best from each in order to develop wholesome tolerant personalities. Such diversity can be looked upon as an asset to enrich the learning experience and integrate children into a strong unit, irrespective of physical or cultural differences.

Nieto and Bode define culture as “ the values, traditions, worldview and social and political relationships created, shared and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class, religion or other shared identity.” (Nieto and Bode, 2012) They add that language plays a critical role in learning. I agree that if students of different cultures and identities are educated in such a way so as to minimize their differences and stress on their commonalities, we would be building a stronger tomorrow based on respect and understanding of people different from us who could enrich one another and together build strong communities that are enriched by their diversity.

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As a child who belonged to a culture that was different from the one I encountered at school, I learned to negotiate between two worlds - the one in school and the one at home. In the beginning it was difficult and I was often confused. As a child my cultural identity was mostly discounted. I was one among a lot of others. Perhaps, this facet of a teacher's role in her classroom had not yet been highlighted as it is today. However being a child, I quickly realized that the only way out for me was to be better at some things than most other students. Once I had mastered being bicultural and could alternate successfully between the correct behavior at school and at home, I began to feel more comfortable. Besides, my affinity for learning languages and accents as well as my grasp of mathematics and science, was an asset that I used to make friends among different sections of my school group. Naturally my proficiency in subjects that other students found difficult in grasping gave me confidence and increased my self-esteem.

The role of culture, I think, is very important in learning. Different cultures have different strengths and weaknesses. Each one's learning style is different. Some learn better in groups while others as individuals, still others retain visual images better than the written word. When students are taught to respect differences and focus on commonalities, they begin to value the impact of culture on their own development and appreciate the value of diversity in bonding with others.

Having experienced the confusion of living in two different cultural worlds, I have a greater understanding of what such children go through. I would endeavor to make all students comfortable with their diversities, and encourage them to find common ground to weave a beautiful mosaic rich in cultural diversity and knit with strong ties to build a better and more tolerant

society.

References

Nieto, S. & Bode, P. 2012

Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education.

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New York: Pearson.