

On your first day of student teaching you may be surprised at the diverse student population in your classroom. Indeed, today's classrooms are a direct reflection of our ever-increasing heterogeneous society. How you decide to deal with that diversity is a factor that will help to determine your degree of success as a teacher.

What is diversity?

Diversity is a broad term that speaks to a wide range of differences. When we think about the differences between and among people, we often think about diversity as meaning cultural diversity. There are many other aspects of diversity to take into account, however. Consider that the student population of a typical classroom might easily include students who represent both genders, various ethnicities, religions, socio-economic strata, ages, sexual orientation, and physical or mental abilities.

How do you deal with diversity in your classroom? One of your first goals as a teacher should be to set up a learning environment that treats all students as equals. This necessitates creating a place where tolerance and respect for others is embraced. In this atmosphere there is no space for discriminatory practices, bigotry, or bullying. Clearly communicate your expectations for an inclusive classroom and then provide a role model through your own actions.

Tips for Classroom Teaching

1. Honoring a diverse classroom might begin with looking at similarities among students. For the youngest students, discuss ideas that all people share; for example, the need for shelter, food, and friendship. Show artworks with these concepts. Ask students to interpret how the artist communicates ideas about shared needs. For older students, consider introducing Boyer's Human Commonalities, a list of eight concepts that people throughout the world share. Show varied artworks. Ask students to determine which commonality is most expressed in each work and how the commonality is shown.



Diversity in the Artroom

By Pam Stephens

- 2.** Do not single out students or call attention to differences.
- 3.** Use resource materials that are sensitive to issues of diversity. Including examples of artwork created from various peoples of the world suggests that you appreciate contributions by all artists. Remember to include examples of art objects created by self-trained artists.
- 4.** Provide books, games, posters, magazines, and other student resources that show dissimilar people working or playing together in harmony.
- 5.** Avoid art activities that duplicate objects or symbols that are held sacred. Exploring and learning about sacred objects or symbols helps students to better understand belief systems other than their own; however, asking students to re-create the objects dishonors the meaning and intent. If you have difficulty grasping this concept, think about those icons that you personally

hold sacred. How would you want those icons studied in an artroom?

- 6.** When questions about issues of diversity arise, answer students in an honest and direct way. If you don't know the answer, don't hedge. Admit that you don't know the answer, but that you'll try to find out. Or better yet, ask students to help you find the answer. ☺

Reference

Boyer, E. (1992). "Educating in a multicultural world." Retrieved from www.teched.coe.ohio-state.edu/Courses/EDT&L846/Boyer.html

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