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How to Work on Diversity in the Classroom

Addressing student diversity is still considered one of the main challenges in the education system. A school culture in which people embrace diversity in the classroom can positively impact the entire school community. When this happens, a school creates a safe, supportive, and helpful environment for students, families, and staff that, in turn, allows students to grow academically and socially.

In an increasingly fragmented society, the ability to connect with friends, co-workers, family, and neighbours with diverse backgrounds and abilities is a significant differential. Diversity improves skills and competencies such as critical thinking, builds empathy, and encourages students to think differently. If you want to develop ways to boost classroom diversity, this post is for you.

Diversity is everything that makes people different from each other. This includes many factors: race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, age, religious beliefs, or political convictions, to name a few of the most prominent. The combination of these and other factors makes each of us unique.

Diversity in the classroom better develops critical thinking. When anyone talks to someone 'different', they are more likely to consider other people's points of view. Eventually, they come to understand nuances about topics they hadn't considered previously. Challenging students to think about diverse perspectives can also teach them how to interact with their peers on a social level and equip them with skills they will use for the rest of their lives. This point is tied closely to the mindset of many teachers who prepare students to be better people for tomorrow, preparing them for an uncertain and unknown future.

Help students feel represented and included.

When schools adopt inclusive and responsive approaches to diversity, students are more likely to see their identity represented in classroom materials or other students. When diversity is not a priority, and these students do not feel included, they are more likely not to participate, be more reserved, and feel inferior to their peers.

Reassess the teaching materials

Review your teaching resources critically and look for ways to increase diversity. Your content or knowledge may have only one focus and is not considering all voices, resulting in many students feeling unrepresented. It only takes a moment to ask students why different perspectives are not included and challenge them to apply critical thinking skills.

Know your students

Each student in your community is unique. As a teacher, you can take advantage of this fact to build a culture of rich and diverse inclusiveness. Some productive options could be to take a quiz at the beginning of the course on their background and interests, and show students that they can come and talk to you whenever they want. Knowing students helps you to understand their strengths and weaknesses, so you are better equipped to build a safe and secure learning environment where everyone can thrive.

Don't be afraid to tackle inequality

An essential element is creating a safe space for students and educators to talk about how issues of discrimination impact them on a personal level, in the classroom, and throughout the school. The more diversity is talked about at school, in faculty meetings, and in tutorials, the easier it will be for all teachers to talk about and address diversity issues. Responding immediately and effectively to inappropriate comments or actions helps to draw a line so that students are not dragged down by others who are not good role models. Using language that promotes positivity and does not reinforce existing stereotypes is essential.