

Importance Of Diversity Consciousness For Educators

Posted on August 24, 2019

The diverse nature of the United States' education system calls for educators of no less calibre than diversity-conscious educators. Students nowadays have unique and diverse cultures, experiences, backgrounds, and mindsets that educators can harness to improve the learning environment. The flip side of diversity is that it can also act as a barrier to both teaching and learning if not handled scrupulously. Educators' most earnest endeavour is to be competent in their field of expertise. The best way to become competent in the current dispensation is, therefore, to embrace the prevailing diversity and cultivate an encyclopedic knowledge of how to handle these diversity issues and create an aura of equitable learning for each and every student. This essay is bound to pursue a two-fold purpose: first, to describe two distinct student groups, and second, to explain the importance of diversity consciousness for educators in the US. Part A will handle the first purpose, while Part B will handle the second aim.

Part A: Student Groups

Diversity is not limited to culture, race, and social background. There are students from all walks of life. Socioeconomic factors, health issues, language disparities, physical disability, and mental health are among the diverse factors that educators have to consider as they seek to impart knowledge. The two distinct groups I wish to discuss are not native English speakers and students with a mental health condition called autism.

Non-English-Speaking Students

There is now a recognizable lot of learners who hail from immigrant families who do not speak English at all. In addition to that, there are expatriate students who come from regions where English is not a native language. Hence, they cannot communicate fluently in English. For instance, Lian (2017) asserts that over 30% of students from China come to study in the USA but do not have any background in English. The National Center for Education Statistics gives a rough estimate of 4.4 million learners who were not fluent in English at the beginning of 2014 (Kena et al., 2016). This represents about 9% of the total student population. Such a big number, right? Yet, these students, just like their counterparts who are fluent English speakers, have come to drink from the oasis of knowledge. Shall they be allowed to return thirsty? Certainly not. These students need assistance with the language in order to aid their learning, and that duty rests on the shoulders of none other than the educators themselves. It is important to pay keen attention to some of the challenges that these students face in the learning setup: most of them cannot draw any sense from textbooks,

assignments, and other reading materials scripted in English.

Nobody can object to the assertion that failure to understand English swiftly presents a huge obstacle to their learning. The inability to communicate in English is not a problem yet; the real challenge lies in the fact that these students never feel comfortable in class. They have to contend with social segregation, another big learning barrier. Research findings indicate that academic excellence and social development are tightly hinged on the ability of students to feel welcome, socially accepted, and comfortable (Braden, Wassell, Scantlebury & Grover, 2016). Therefore, educators need to ensure that these students feel a sense of belonging in spite of their incapacitated language ability. More than that, educators should assist the students to learn English while, in the same breath, helping them to understand the scripts administered to them. They can also administer the lessons and assignments in the student's language alongside English.

Students with Autism

Mental health is another factor. Students with autism experience and exhibit serious challenges with behaviour, socialization, speech, and non-verbal communication. These challenges, however, are against the backdrop of numerous and uncommon strengths that these students possess. According to the most recent research, autism accounts for more than 8.5% of learners with special needs (Kena et al., 2016). The overall percentage of students with special needs is 13% (Bryant, Bryant & Smith, 2015), which means that autism represents the biggest pie. This implies that students with autism surpass half a million in number. In the classes, research has revealed that these students do not find a responsive teaching environment in most institutions. It is true that teaching a student with autism in the same class as other students can be such a frustrating ordeal. One factor that will enable autistic students to learn effectively is a connection with the educator, which the educators themselves must create and bolster. Moreover, educators can boost the performance of autistic children through the Pygmalion effect. Pygmalion effect holds that student performance is directly proportional to educator expectation (Friedrich, Flunger, Nagengast, Jonkmann, & Trautwein, 2015). So, educators do not lose hope in teaching these students but rather have high expectations that the students will grasp the concepts.

Part B: Importance of Having Responsive Approaches

The breadth of student diversity is far beyond the scope of this paper. However, going by the two examples discussed herein, educators must recognize the presence of these diverse groups of learners in their classrooms. It is indispensable that educators be versatile enough to adapt to the changing face of the classroom in the present age. Responsiveness to diverse student backgrounds could be challenging but very necessary. First, educators avoid chauvinism and have equal expectations for all students, as this has a direct bearing on student performance. In spite of their

differences, students cannot be taught separately. So, educators must assist all students in being on par with their fellows. When students have a strong connection with the teacher, they are likely to do well. Remember, being a competent teacher stretches beyond the confines of syllabus coverage. Therefore, it is not exaggerated to assert that the best way to be competent as a teacher and to ensure exemplary performance among all students is to be responsive to their unique needs.

References

Lian, Z. (2017). *Predictors of Depression/Anxiety, Mental Health Service Utilization, and Help-Seeking for Chinese International Students: Role of Acculturation, Microaggressions, Social Support, Coping Self-Efficacy, Stigma, and College Staffs' Cultural Competence and Cultural Humility* (Doctoral dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University).

Braden, S., Wassell, B. A., Scantlebury, K., & Grover, A. (2016). Supporting language learners in science classrooms: insights from middle-school English language learner students. *Language and Education*, 30(5), 438-458.

Kena, G., Hussar, W., McFarland, J., de Brey, C., Musu-Gillette, L., Wang, X., ... & Barmer, A. (2016). The Condition of Education 2016. NCES 2016-144. *National Center for Education Statistics*.

Bryant, D. P., Bryant, B. R., & Smith, D. D. (2015). *Teaching students with special needs in inclusive classrooms*. Sage Publications.

Friedrich, A., Flunger, B., Nagengast, B., Jonkmann, K., & Trautwein, U. (2015). Pygmalion effects in the classroom: Teacher expectancy effects on students' math achievement. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 41, 1-12.