

Teaching about Respect and Tolerance with Presentations on Cultural Values

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Abstract: Teaching students from diverse backgrounds requires more than sufficient. Very often battles occur among students due to not understanding each other's values. This study presents experience of a teacher who teaches students from diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural groups. As disrespect, misunderstanding and intolerance were common in the class, it was difficult for the teacher to advance respect among the students for diversity. In order to encourage the students to embrace diversity, the teacher made them introduce their cultures through presentations in the classroom. Although at the beginning the students continued to tease each other by making fun of each other's cultural values, after some time it was discovered that they were entering the classroom with a real respect and tolerance for diversity.

Keywords: Respect, Tolerance, Diversity, Mutual Understanding

1. Introduction

Teaching about respect and tolerance in diverse communities has always been a difficult task. Promoting mutual understanding in a school where students are from diverse backgrounds is a challenging issue to deal with. Students in such an environment do not tolerate each other easily or recognize the diversity of cultures. Creating a tolerant society is a vital role of schools. My sixth grade students were a difficult class to teach because the students were from diverse backgrounds. As the students were from diverse religious, ethnic and cultural groups, intolerance and disrespect were common among them. They were not ready to tolerate each other. In addition to delivering the curriculum, I was very much busy with delivering an ethos of respect and tolerance to create community cohesion. They were always insulting and teasing each other, and there was sadness and anger in the classroom. These uncomfortable feelings negatively influenced their achievement. School is the setting where all students learn about respect and tolerance but my students were concerned about receiving criticism from others in the classroom if they act out of the norm. It was a discouraging experience to see that the students made no attempt at all to understand each other's values.

2. Cultural Presentations to Develop Tolerance

There was a need for intervention. The attitudes the students had towards each other affected the classroom atmosphere, and teaching them became very hard. I offered my students to make presentations to their friends about their cultural values. The class was excited to introduce their culture to others. Every day one student was talking about his/her own culture. The presenters were even wearing their traditional clothes, showing short films on TV about their culture. Each student was spending 20 minutes. At the beginning some students attempted to tease the presenters and sometimes it was difficult to control them. However, after a few presentations they seemed to be looking forward to listening to more presentations. They were beginning to be open to understanding that the presentations were useful for them to broaden their perspectives. I was encouraging them to ask questions to the presenters to learn more about other cultures.

Tolerance should be taught to enable the students to function in diverse societies (Vogt, 1994). In modern diverse societies individuals should respect each other and develop mutual understanding. In creation of a tolerant society, inter-community relations should be developed. I discovered that the cultural presentations enhanced classroom respect for diversity. The students were committed to the project and they put a lot of effort into their presentations. Vlachou (1997) explains that teachers are not only responsible for delivering the curriculum but also an ethos of respect and tolerance to contribute to the quality of students' learning experiences. The students became peaceful during presentations. They were getting to know each other and they were starting to embrace diversity.

Tolerance is the fundamental value that brings people together. When people are intolerant of others' ideas, community cohesion cannot be established. Although the students did not come to acceptance of what others believe, they were not holding negative evaluations towards each other after the presentations. Often teachers avoid discussing controversial issues in the classroom because they fear that it will be difficult to control the class (McNeil, 1986). However, for intellectual and spiritual development of the students, this is essential. Interaction in the classroom can be accomplished as long as the individuals tolerate and respect each other.

People need to learn to live with diversity (Vogt, 1994). If people fail to discuss ideas to find common ground, conflict occurs. For that reason learning about differences among individuals allows people to recognize the diversity of values and cultures. The transmission of information about cultural differences through presentations helped the students build tolerance and respect for all traditions. I believe that this project inspired my teaching. In these presentations I tried to show my students that all humans are equal. As they learnt more about others' cultures, they connected more deeply.

The major goal of education is to teach students about tolerance (Grover, 2007). Colesante and Biggs (1999) argue that schools can help students to promote tolerance. The integration of cultural values into the curriculum brought about positive outcomes. The fundamental concepts of respect and tolerance were taught in the presentations. The students had an opportunity to learn about their responsibilities to community. The inclusion of teaching cultural values into the subjects at schools for the promotion of universal respect taught the students to live responsibly as global citizens. It is highlighted that a climate

of tolerance can be accomplished if cultural ethnic and religious identity of people are recognized and respected. In an educational setting it was taught to the students that they have to cope with diversity. It is true that if the students want their beliefs to be understood by others, they need to understand others' cultures. Without criticizing other people, they need to see the similarities and differences between cultures and learn about the contexts in which people live. This comparison will enable them to increase their level of tolerance.

3. Conclusion

Teaching about respect and tolerance through presentations on cultural values was a different approach for the students. The goal was to develop inter-community relations to promote mutual understanding so that they learn about respect and tolerance. In a class where the students constantly insulted each other due to cultural differences, presentations to introduce cultural values played a vital role in encouraging the students to understand each other. The students came to an acceptance of others' cultural values. It was seen that creating an educational setting in which the students had a chance to present about their cultural values fostered respect, tolerance and mutual understanding. Teachers should develop an ethos to support respect and tolerance and they should integrate these fundamental issues into the curriculum. People need to learn how to live responsibly in the community from early ages and schools are the best places to teach individuals about respect and tolerance for the establishment of tolerant society.

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