

AnastasiosKoulearmanis

Article #1

Grant Carl, C. “*Storytelling About Racial and Cultural Competence with a Focus on Multiculturalism.*”

In this article, the author, Carl A. Grant, begins by focusing on the education of students of color. He is striving to enhance racial and cultural competence of new and veteran teachers and educators. This is built upon the groundwork created by others. One’s experiences and thinking is greatly influenced by the work of many others. As teachers and educators we must teachall students, to ensure they have socially and economically flourishing lives.

Grant speaks about the elimination of segregation in schools and the Civil Rights Movement, and their impact on education. He goes on to say that educators should provide students of color and all students with a multicultural and social justice education that will enable them to form their own identities in society and empower themselves.

Globalization and multiculturalism are discussed. Globalization is everywhere, but what are absent from the discussion are education and how to prepare students for a new and ever changing society, a new “humanism,” and how schooling falls behind “the real world.” It isn’t enough to just compare international achievement test scores. A multicultural education not only teaches the 3 R’s, but also the effects of globalization on those who are poor and live in non-industrialized countries. The traditional concept of education as a public social good should not be lost.

The author also tells a personal story about cultural sensitivity, “special education” and a black boy, his grandson, named Gavin. He speaks of the dangers in the practices of schools labeling black boys

as individuals with behavior problems. What we need to further consider are the students' voices and feelings. We must listen to them.

Lastly, suggestions are presented for becoming racially and culturally competent educators. Be equitable. Be tolerant. Empower yourself and in turn empower your students!

For the most part, I agree with the author of this article on the principles of multiculturalism and racial tolerance in education and in the classroom. All children have the right to an equal and fair education. Even the author himself (who is African American), became angry and defensive, crying out "racism," when the school suggested his grandson be "tested" because he couldn't stay seated in class. He exhibited stereotypical behavior and prejudice, the very same behavior he claims to be fighting against. He too was too quick to judge. It shows that it is very easy to fall into the traps. It is sad to admit but we all carry certain biases and prejudices no matter how enlightened we feel we are. I believe that we must try to stop ourselves and try to "check them" at the door when we can, or at least be more aware of them in order to discuss, understand and perhaps even change them.

Injustices will exist in the world, as do inequities. But as teachers, it is our duty to strive for improvement, excellence, justice and equality in education for all students. Teachers must see differences among students as assets. We must celebrate the individual, cultural heritages, languages, families and challenge stereotypes and intolerance regardless of race, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender and religious backgrounds. We must also encourage diversity. There must be more acceptance and eliminate the need to oppress others. There is peace and truth in the question, "Why can't we all get along?" We can accomplish much more and all of the above allows for a more conducive, learning environment.

This article reminded me that I am a student of public education here in New York City and a product of desegregation and the teachings of the Civil Rights Movement. I remember my classes as being diverse and multicultural. We respected one another in the classroom. We accepted and celebrated

our differences. I feel privileged that my experiences were positive ones. In addition to this at home, my parents also made respecting others a priority.

These lessons of respect, tolerance and acceptance have indeed influenced my career as an administrator, and will continue to do so. As an building leader I have always incorporated multiculturalism into the curriculum through reading, writing, storytelling, poetry, history, social studies, biographies, current events, geography, art and music that have included: Black History, Women's History, Greek Culture and History, Spanish History and many holidays. Some examples are: Langston Hughes, Harriet Tubman, G.W. Carver, The Civil War, Abe Lincoln, F. Douglass, Rosa Parks, Louis Armstrong, Pres. Obama, Martin Luther Jing Jr., Cinco De Mayo, Chinese New Year, Chanukah and Kwanzaa, just to name more than a few. All of the above mentioned are not only informative, but educational as well.

After reading this text, I intend to be more culturally competent and use more of the tools and suggestions of many of these articles. I hope to bring a new wisdom and creativity to my school. I want the students to be informed citizens, to be active, engaging, dynamic and lifelong learners.

AnastasiosKoulearmanis

Article#2

Sleeter Christine, “*Learning to Become a Racially and Culturally Competent Ally.*”

Racial inequality is a very sensitive issue. Although much progress has been made in the last twenty years, there is still much room for improvement. The article by Christine Sleeter entitled, “Learning to Become a Racially and Culturally Competent Ally,” is a personal account of her experiences with diversity through her childhood and adult years. Sleeter grew up in a Caucasian environment where she recalled her first conversation with her aunt about race discrimination. Instead of being instilled with her Aunt’s perception of black people, she wanted to judge for herself whether her aunt’s opinion was accurate. During her teaching years she so wanted to be approved by the black community, and by her students, then she delved into their culture and tried to be someone to whom they could turn. At one point of the article Sleeter wrote, “Several black women I encountered regarded me as a White threat who was out to steal Black men.” This goes to show that discrimination is not one-sided. Sleeter continued to write that in order to be able to fit into her new community, she had to identify with her students. She became a multicultural teacher and helped to develop a curriculum that would foster and encourage her students to succeed.

While this article helped to foster the idea that teachers should be tolerant and to teach tolerance, the author only concentrates on race. In today’s world, there are so many more issues of discrimination than just race. There is discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, age,

disability/handicap, economic standing, and religion. During the school year, there are so many acts of violence, mainly in the form of bullying, that many students do not receive the proper education because their “label” prevents an environment conducive to learning. As teachers, our goal is always to provide our students with an environment where they feel safe to be who they are and to share their ideas and culture freely. In this way, teachers encourage a place of creativity allowing students to achieve their highest potential and even exceed the levels that are expected of them. We should never discriminate or deny students because of any label, whether it is one that is racially biased, or denigrates them on a different appearance, religion, etc. While we should be tolerant we also need to teach tolerance to our students.

In the beginning of the school year, classroom rules should clearly emphasize classroom unity. If there is not a school policy, one should be put in place to help instill a community of learners, rather than one that is volatile and fearful. Further, lessons geared towards bully issues with possible speakers should be part of the curriculum. I feel that guest speakers, those who have been bullied or those who bullied, who are able to speak to children and tell their story would leave more of an impact on the students than reading a book about bullying issues. If students get to hear the effects of bullying firsthand, they will be more empathetic and less likely to participate in such negative behavior.

Also, I feel that it is important to incorporate as much multicultural learning whenever possible, just as Sleeter addressed in her article. If we as teachers can teach about different cultures and teach about the beauty in each culture, students have something they can now understand and possibly even relate to. For example, on a unit of African American History, if students learn about the enslavement of the black people the injustice of it and their fight for

equality, students now know something about the culture. They have the facts and the knowledge on that culture to see and judge for themselves, just as Sleeter did.

We as educators need to be inclusive of other cultures in our teaching regardless of whether or not the class is culturally diverse. By teaching our students about other ways of life, we as educators would be broadening students' conception of "what is normal," thus lessening hostility towards those who are different from them.

AnastasiosKoulearmanis

Article #3

Karen Teel writes a compelling account in this chapter about her journey to become a competent teacher for African American children. Many teachers do not realize that their own backgrounds and life experiences affect the type of teacher they can be. Today classrooms across America are more diverse than they have ever been. Students come from various socio economic backgrounds; have different linguistic abilities and all have different learning capabilities. In this chapter, Teel discusses how her own background affected the way she taught African American students and describes the journey she needed to make in order to become a more successful and unbiased teacher.

An important characteristic of being a successful teacher is being able to “constantly reflect on their practice and include others in assessment of their practice” (Teel, p. 149). Teel did this while unsuccessfully teaching inner-city African American students in the early 1990s. Up until then she had much success as a teacher but hadn’t really taught in a diverse setting. Instead of blaming the students, she reached out to a peer and asked for advice. It became clear that Teel subconsciously was biased towards her students and her perceptions stemmed from the ‘White Privilege’ she was born and raised with. White Privilege is defined as “the unearned advantages of being white in a racially stratified society” (Neville, Worthington, &Spanierman, 2001). Teel gives an account of her life growing up with basically minimal interaction with people of other races. Her first encounter with anyone of a different race was when she attended college at the University of Berkley. Once she became a teacher though, most of her students were white, but that gradually changed as court orders following the Civil Rights

Movement began mandating busing and the integration of schools. As she began having some African American students in her class, she had asked an administrator for advice. He basically told her that these kids would be trouble and suggested she utilize simplified lessons, have few class discussions, and basically keep the students under control (Teel, p.139). If the administrator in Teel's building already had these preconceived notions about students of different races, then it is highly probable that these students stood little chance to excelling. Teachers and administrators must treat all students equally, regardless of their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. If many teachers base their opinions of students on their own biases and stereotypes, then not only will they fail as educators but their students are the ones who will suffer the most.

Throughout her research, Teel discovered that "African American students historically had been set up for failure" (Teel, p.140). In her own case, she realized that she was harming these students by having such low expectations of them. She had allowed "the ghost of racism" to affect her teaching style. While Teel does discuss mostly about biased teachers she doesn't speak enough about how the system in America has constantly failed these children. While it is important for a teacher to overcome biases and preconceived notions, standardized tests and textbooks must also begin to be made more racially sensitive. Standardized tests and textbooks are just another example of white privilege, and studies have consistently shown that students from diverse backgrounds are unfairly affected by these educational tools.

Teel's account of her journey to become a more effective teacher in a diverse setting is certainly a great guide for all teachers to use. She discussed how teachers must build a rapport with their students and be able to relate to them. She also provides a conceptual framework which had not only helped herself but which can be used by other educators to help them become more competent teachers. While her framework will indeed assist teachers in diverse settings, it is also a great tool for any

classroom. She provides characteristics that all teachers should have, regardless of the diversity in their classrooms.