Cultural Diversity in a First Grade Classroom

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EDU 390

When I hear the word “cultural diversity”, I often think about one’s ethnicity or one who is from another country. Well, that is not necessarily the case as there are other components that fit into this category such as religion, gender, and economic class to name a few. In this paper, I am going to discuss how socioeconomic status can affect the academic ability of students.

I had the opportunity to work with first grade students at Prairie View Elementary School in New Salem, North Dakota during the 2015-2016 school year. According to School Digger, there are approximately 180 students total in the elementary school and out of this number about 2% of them are of ethnicity other than white or Caucasian. According to Public School Review, the school is made up of half and half male to female student ratio. Finally, there is about a 21% of the students who receive free or reduced-price lunches.

When I began my voluntary experience in the first grade room in October of 2015, the students were really not that receptive to me. We had not known each other, nor had we established any type of working relationship, so it was rather hard for me to get the students motivated to work. However, over time, the students started getting used to seeing me in their classroom and willing to help them out either individually or in small groups. For the most part, I worked with students either in math or reading and some students I had the opportunity to work with them for both math and reading.

I had the opportunity to work with one little boy one-on-one in reading who you could tell had little or no support at home with reading. He seemed to struggle a bit with word recognition. Every time he came across a word he did not know, it seemed liked he just gave up. I praised him when he was able to pronounce a longer word and tried through this strategy to build up his confidence. Once he was able to build on his confidence, I knew he would become a better reader.

I also had the opportunity to work with a small group of students during their reading group time. This varied from week to week who would be assigned to me. I sometimes had really good readers and other times, I had some who would struggle a little more with their reading and understanding. For the most part in these groups, I was there to help them along so they would not get frustrated and just give up.

During the math groups, I had a group of about five to six students made up of a mix of boys and girls. This was the group that was defined by the socioeconomic status. In addition to their status, a few of them, I believe, had medical conditions such as ADD or ADHD which did not help their learning process either. This group really struggled with math, so I would take them out of the room and work with them as a small group. Some of them would really have a hard time focusing on what we were doing and others, at times, were able to work their way through the problems one by one so they could return back to the classroom. Overall, this was the group that would have trouble with any subject area and really had a hard time focusing on what they were to accomplish. This would include working on an art project in class. This group was often seen concentrating on something other than what the teacher was telling them to do, so when it was time for them to start the project they did not know how to begin. They, also, were always the last group of students to finish anything whether it were something we were working on as a class or in their small groups outside the room.

I also had the opportunity to work with two Native American girls. I enjoyed these two girls as one could tell they did not have much of an outside life. As a matter of fact, one day the younger of the two was hiding cookies that the class was receiving as a treat. I had approached her and asked that she leave the cookies on the counter so that after we got back from music that the entire class would get a cookie. I believe she was hiding these as she did not get many cookies at home or she was really hungry because she lacked nutrition at home. The older of the two would normally seek me out on the days I were at school. She would make pictures for me or just tell me a story. One day, she approached me and told me that she really like me because I listened to her and she thought that I was fair. This really made me feel good, but I could also tell with her interactions that not many people had the time of day to listen to what she had to say. This is a really sad situation. What makes this even worse, is that the two girls did not attend school regularly as their mother had a job out of town, so she ended up taking the girls to some family members who lived close to her job. Eventually, they ended up leaving the school and moving closer to their mom’s work. The youngest girl could really have used the extra help as she seemed to be falling behind in her school work. It was hard, though, because they only came for a shorter day or not at all most days to keep them up to date on their homework.

The last type of encounter I had with this class was a boy who seemed to be pretty normal but appeared to be a student in the lower socioeconomic group as well. He had a paraprofessional with him on a full-time basis, so I knew he needed some services of some type. As it turned out, he needed constant prompting to achieve the task that he was assigned. There were times when he refused to do what he was supposed to and tried to be the center of attention in the classroom. This was a unique type of situation.

The adaptions that I witnessed with this group of students was more the one on one help that they were receiving. Some of these children qualified for Title services, so were out of the room for 20 minutes to a half hour per day working on math or reading. Some of the students were out of the room for both math and reading throughout the day. As far as in the home and family involvement, I know that a few of the parents seemed to be working closely with the teacher to accomplish some goals at home. As far as community resources, because we are such a small town there is really not much in the way for community resources. The school tries their best to accommodate student success as much as they can within the school day and within the services the school has to offer. We do have a special education department that is sought out for those who really need these services, but not all students in the socioeconomic class qualify for these types of services.

This was a really good experience for me. I had the opportunity to work with the students who were in the lower socioeconomic class and really enjoyed spending time with them. They, for the most part, seemed appreciative for the help they received. I will make sure that when I have my own classroom that the students who are in the lower socioeconomic class will have as much one on one time as I can give them in order to successfully achieve their academic goals. I will try to work with them, if I can, in the mornings before school to provide them whatever support I can.

Just because a child comes for a low socioeconomic status does not mean that they do not want to succeed academically. For the most part, they may not have well educated parents and therefore lack that support for the home. Again, I will do whatever I can to be sure that all of my students can succeed academically.

References

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