

Community and Diversity Analysis Paper

A nurturing community is an environment where one is fully accepted, attended to, and loved. It is a place where one's strengths and difficulties are shared with others who support him/her. Within the classroom I've observed, there is not much of a nurturing community, but instead competition is used daily in disrupting the form of a secure community. In order to successfully measure up the community within my observed classroom, one must look at opportunities to show one's self fully, opportunities to know others well and opportunities to show for students to work and help each other. One also must look closely at the teacher's role in producing a community in the classroom.

In my observed classroom there are three different reading groups which meet daily. While teaching each reading group, I noticed that the students tease each other and are nasty to one another. For example, when Tyler was having trouble with the guided reading assignment, I saw Julia offer to help him. Julia said, "Tyler I am done with my assignment do you want me to help you?" Since I was teaching the group I encouraged them to help one another in order to reinforce cooperation. I said, "Oh that's great Julia if you are done help someone else finish up". Tyler responded to Julia by saying, "I don't want you to help me you are fat". Julia began to get teary eyed and said, "I don't care everyone calls me fat". A nurturing community is a place where it is safe to be yourself. Julia knew the material and in a nurturing community should have been able to, proudly show what she had accomplished, confident that classmates would be delighted, proud, and full of praise and admiration, yet in her efforts to do so she was

humiliated in front of the whole group diminishing her security within the classroom, her self-esteem, and her chance to experience success.

There have not been any community building activities implemented into my observed classroom other than the two that Alyssa and I have initiated. Community building activities create a fun way for children to get to know others in the classroom well. In my observed classroom, students often engage in competitive activities that can be damaging to all. Competition creates a huge barrier in the classroom when trying to create a nurturing community because it causes children to work against others, rather than with others. Therefore students see other students in the classroom as an opponent that they must beat in order to be the “winner”. For example, “if Jimmy can beat Christina then he will be the winner.” Every week there is a spelling bee the day before the spelling test. Students line up in the back of the classroom and the teacher gives each student a word and if they spell it wrong they sit down. If they spell it right they stay in the running to be the “winner”. During this activity students are discouraged to participate because of fear of failure. For example, when Tony did not want to participate I heard him say, “ I don’t want to do the spelling bee, I never win”. The teacher proceeded to yell at the entire class to stand in a line in the back of the room. She yelled, “everyone be quiet and stand in a straight line in the back of the room; it is time for the spelling bee”. At the end of the spelling bee the winner gets a candy prize reward. This activity creates competition in the classroom encouraging students to think, “I am a good speller I can beat others at this game”. This activity distorted Tony’s view of never being “good enough or smart enough or worthy enough” to be the winner. In a cooperative community people understand that different people are good at different

things, and by working together rather than competitively one can learn more. One uses each others strength and weaknesses in order to help them improve, not to be able to say that one person is the winner and everyone else are losers. This activity creates tension through competition in the classroom and helps students know others by becoming competitive in the race for a prize and to win.

In my observed classroom students work independently at all times. For example, during morning work Randy was having trouble and wanted to ask Jenny who sits right next to him for help with the activity. Randy asks Jenny, “How do you say this pointing to a word in the sentence that is asking the question”. Andy the boy sitting in front of Randy says out loud, “Randy is cheating!” Although the teacher had placed students next to one another she said, “Stop cheating and complete the assignment yourself.” Randy then asked the teacher, “How do I pronounce this word, (while pointing to the word) Apostrophe?” The teacher proceeded to read Randy the entire sentence, “Place two apostrophes in the sentence. In a cooperative community students should be encouraged to help one another. Morning work is not a test that is being assessed; it is an activity to help one learn how to edit sentences. In this case Randy was not cheating, rather, he needed help in order to complete his assignment. He trusted that Jenny could help him but after trying to ask for help and support he was diminished by being called a cheater. Students should not be made fun of or wrongly accused for trying to work with each other as in a coherent community students should work with each other instead of against each other.

Competition and put downs are two of the main reasons why student in my classroom can not show themselves fully and know other classmates well. My

classroom does not hold the characteristics of a nurtured community. The teacher's role in the classroom plays a big part in creating this type of setting. She decides to implement competitive activities in the classroom causing children to be scared of failure. For example, instead of implementing a spelling bee students should pair up encouraging and helping each other to learn the words for the next day's test. Students would then be working with each other instead of against each other in order to learn the spelling words. The teacher also chooses to ignore the put downs in my classroom which are vital to one's self-esteem. For example, instead of having open communication and explaining to the students that Randy was not a cheater she simply told him to look at his own paper making it difficult for anyone to ask for help because of fear that they would be called a cheater. By explaining to the students that Randy was not cheating and encouraging them to work together students would then feel more comfortable to take risks, learn and connect with others.

It is clear that teachers have a huge role in creating a strong classroom community where everyone is respected for their differences and encouraged to help each other. It is important that teachers realize that establishing a strong classroom community lays the foundation for academic growth, and acceptance of diversity. When teachers realize this, they will understand how important creating a safe and nurturing community is to the students' learning environment.

Diversity Analysis

Living in a racially, ethnically and culturally diverse society, as a role model to others, teachers must take strong positions against prejudice and discrimination in their

classroom, schools, and the society. Within my observed classroom there are people from many diverse backgrounds. The teacher in the classroom is a Caucasian female, their teacher's aid is an African-American male, ten students are African-American males, seven students are African-American females, one student is a Puerto Rican female, and one student is half Caucasian and half African-American male. Students in the class are compiled of many different sizes as well. For example, one student is almost 5'6" and another student is 4'. Everybody is different; some students are pudgy while others are very petite. Students' skills within the classroom vary within a range. Some students are reading at the kindergarten level, and other students are reading at a seventh grade level. Each individual student has different activities that they enjoy participating in. For example, Elisa enjoys Karate while Jake likes football. Every classroom is diverse in one way or another; there are no two individuals in the whole world that are exactly alike, nor are there in the classroom. Teachers need to take advantages of diversity in their classroom by to encourage students to recognize the differences among and within various cultural, ethnic, and racial groups. By adapting the curriculum, pedagogy, classroom organization and climate in the classroom teacher can successfully address racial, economic and gender differences within the classroom.

In my observed classroom, the multicultural curriculum is very limited. In order to teach an integrated curriculum teachers must reevaluate their materials. For example, during our read-aloud sessions, my class has read *Matilda* and *Junie B. Jones Rides the School Bus*. Both of these books are written by Euro-American Caucasians, and feature Caucasian characters. Books in the classroom library are made up of Goose Bump Series ® books by R.L. Stine, Barbie ® books by Nicky Epstein, and Babysitters Club ® books

by Anne Matthews Martin, which are all written by white authors and are predominately about white people. Having literature and curriculum in the classroom that is biased toward the Euro-American perspective may make students feel that people of other races are devalued and it may give students the message that Euro-Americans are superior. When students are beginning to read, reading books about their own socioeconomic backgrounds may seem more realistic and comfortable but it is imperative that they learn about a wide variety of cultures early on. Reading is a way to implement cultural diversity into the classroom and having a diverse background of materials not affirms to students that the world is constituted of many different cultures, but it also enables students to view multiple perspectives of others.

The school where I did my observation is located in a very poor neighborhood and many of the students come from lower-class families. One student told me a story about where he lived. “My grandparents, parents, brothers, and sisters all live on the top floor of our apartment and our cousins live downstairs.” Another student said to me, “I wish my family had a car that worked.” In order to run the classroom my teacher adapts to the student’ economic needs not by engaging students in activities that they cannot afford. For example, I was talking to the teacher about what she does in order to celebrate holidays in the classroom. I asked her, “What are you going to do for Halloween?” The teacher said, “we just ignore that it is Halloween, this year Halloween is a half day and some students cannot afford costumes.” Similar to economic differences, students within the classroom celebrate different holidays. Therefore instead of addressing all of them, for instance celebrating Hanukah and Christmas together, and teaching students to appreciate one another’s differences, she chooses to ignore them.

Ignoring economic and religious backgrounds by not implementing lessons where everyone can participate causes students to not learn and appreciate differences in others. Using this example, if my teacher used holidays as a tool to teach students about different religious backgrounds it would create a climate where students would learn to accept and appreciate each other's cultural, and religious backgrounds rather than being blind to them.

Students in the classroom notice differences but the teacher does not address them in a constructive manner. For example, Kiwana made fun of Jamie by saying, "Jamie you are only half black." Jamie began to get agitated in his seat. Alyssa the other student teacher in the classroom said to Jaime, "we are all different and that's what makes everyone special." Instead of addressing racial issues and differences in the classroom, my host teacher chose to ignore the situation. As a teacher she should not avoid discussing difficult topics with students. She needs to recognize that students recognize differences in others and they pick up messages about race and ethnicity every day. Ignoring racial differences especially when the result is teasing or put-downs implies to children that it is okay to generate stereotypes and denounce differences as foreign or bad. They will then have a better chance of growing up culturally aware.

The teacher does not take full advantage of her pedagogy. It is the teacher's responsibility to teach children about diversity, not to ignore it. If the teacher took advantage of differences in the classroom by changing the curriculum, and in general the classroom climate to teach children that differences are what makes us all special, students would learn to accept each other as a part of the community by respecting each other for their differences. As a teacher, one has the ability to teach for social justice.

The teacher I've observed needs to take advantage of the role she has in children's lives and adapt her curriculum and environment to help children learn to appreciate and understand people from all different diverse backgrounds.