

Learning about Students from the Teaching Practice of Others: Trying it Out

Educ. 239

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Strategy: Having students work with other students of a different gender and/or a different race.

Source: Yvonne's website. In Yvonne's class, I noticed that one of the stipulations of her discussions was that students had to call on or ask questions to someone of a different gender or race. I found this to be a very interesting technique that forced the students to mix and break down barriers of gender and race.

Reasoning: I noticed that when picking partners, students always picked other students of the same race and same gender. It was almost without fail that this would happen for every activity. Also, one day, my cooperating teacher had them all pass back papers and it amazed me how few of them actually knew the names of their fellow classmates. So I wanted to try an activity that would help them interact with people that weren't necessarily their closest friends.

Lesson Plan Description:

My cooperating teacher was absent that day, and so I was the substitute. Because this was the first time I was teaching and in front of the kids and I knew I would be teaching them later on in the semester, I wanted to take some time to get to know them and allow them to get to know me. I decided on a name game.

When the students came in, I announced that we were going to play a game. I asked them to pick a partner, but it had to be someone of a different gender and a different race than them. After they were all in pairs, I used the practice of dyads I had learned from Mills. I told them each to talk about their names, where they came from, and about any other information they could come up with in a minute and a half's time. There would be one listener and one talker. The listener could not say anything but nod or say things like, "uh-huh." The talker had to talk for the full minute and a half. Then, they would switch. At the end of the dyads, each student had to present their partner to the whole class and tell them some of the interesting things they had learned.

How it went, Reflections of the Lesson:

Students were really excited about the notion of playing a game. When I mentioned separating into race and gender, some of them seemed a little taken a back, but not negatively. There was a lot of response and excited chatter. It felt like no one ever asked them in a classroom setting to actually acknowledge who others were racially and to recognize themselves racially. I don't know if they had somehow learned that those things were taboo in that setting, but I knew they were conscious of it as evidenced by their constant self-segregating when given the opportunity. Even for me, I noticed how I

was slightly taken aback when my students were asking others, "What are you?" and some would respond with their ethnic affiliation. To even have those words spoken felt strange in that setting.

Once the dyads began, I found myself noticing other things like how odd it was to see some of my students mixing with students they never talk to in the class. It was good to see that they were learning things about each other that they never knew before.

Another thing that was interesting about the dyads that I noticed was how hard it was for students to just listen. They would be so tempted to interject comments during the other person's monologue. It is so apparent that students are not naturally good listeners. Also, the talkers often ran out of things to talk about. Some of them really felt like they didn't have enough to say about themselves to fill a minute and a half. It really spoke to me about adolescence and how students still know relatively little about themselves. They're still discovering their likes and dislikes. Many of them talked about their favorite color, but not many got to deeper things.

The class then presented. One partner would share about their other partner. It was great to see how attentive and interested they were in each other. They would laugh and even sometime ask the other person questions. I noticed that the students that had as their partner someone they knew the least, the better their presentations were. I don't know if this was because they were less prone to being distracted in their conversations or if it was because they were genuinely more interested because they didn't know anything about that other person.

At the end, I shared a little about myself, and I noticed how different their responses to me were. They were interested in me as well, and asked me questions about my background. I even got to speak a few of the languages I know.

I found through trying this practice out that I hope to incorporate it into my future classroom much more. It adds the dynamic of personal relationship to the classroom that students often don't feel at school. Students were really interested in who I was and when I told them about myself, they started to respond to me a little more like a person instead of just a teacher.

In calling them out to talk to someone of a different gender and race, some of them, hopefully noticed that these were almost always people they never talked to. If I had my own class, I would probably do this more often and discuss more explicitly the fact that it's important for different cultures to acknowledge their differences and speak about them. We live in a society where "getting along" often means NOT addressing the race issue and pretending it doesn't exist. Race and gender are things that are very salient and important to the students, but not all of them have learned to talk about it in a class setting. It's apparent that students see color, but for whatever reason, they have imbibed the culture's lack of cross-cultural discourse. It was a small step, but I felt like after that, students seemed just a little bit more comfortable with each other and with me.