

Bethany

The following is an excerpt from an online discussion for Art 401, *Methods & Practices for the Art Classroom, Early-Middle Childhood*, at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. This posting within the online class discussion was a response to the question, "Why is it important to know the characteristics of the group you are teaching?"

Characteristics of the group - and multiculturalism

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I think that it is very important to know the characteristics of the group we are teaching for a variety of reasons. First, know their ethnicity - it can help to come up with lesson plans that may speak to their own personal history, traditions, religion, etc. (For ex. a Hmong student may not want to/be inspired to create art about Christmas, etc) so that students can find something that they personally have interest in and/or a tie to, and can remain involved (emotionally) in their art. (I hope this makes sense) Also, I think that it is important to know the culture of students to assign work accordingly. For example, I recently had a prof. discuss learning about the Hmong community and adjusting work accordingly due to the fact that many female Hmong students have cultural responsibilities (cooking, cleaning, taking care of youngsters, etc.) to take care of at night that, within their culture, take precedence over completing school work. I also think that it is important to know a students individual characteristics so that we can understand their content or make suggestions about topics that they may want to create art about (if you know they are passionate about something - suggest it!) Finally, i think it is important so that we can KNOW our students. Students will respect and relate to us better if they know we are taking a special interest in getting to know them.

Also, I think that it is important to understand socioeconomic statuses of our students so that we can help them adjust. Teachers need to be informed of community services and organizations that may be available to help struggling students/families. We should be aware of how the school functions both internally, and externally within the community. Teachers should be aware of services that can be provided to students within the school, but also understand that the school is, in many cases the only stable environment for a student.

Additionally, teachers should know organizations in the community to help students get involved. Often, students who are involved in extracurricular activities and/or community organizations are more positive, and even get better grades. As teachers, we should encourage students to seek out these opportunities. Also, we should be sure that students are able to make art for recreation if they would like (through either an art club, or allowing them to work during study halls in the art room on recreational art).

As teachers, it is also important that we keep in contact with each other regarding students. Teachers each experience very different activities in their classrooms, and by learning from each other we can be more prepared for dealing with situations in our own classrooms. Learning from each other can take place in a variety of ways. Teachers could form their own organization that could meet once a month or so to discuss situations that have arisen in their classrooms and have a discussion regarding what others have done in the past, or could do in the future to deal with situations. Also, attending conferences helps teachers learn how to deal with differing student situations. Learning from those with alternative experiences from your own is very valuable, but often seems to be overlooked by teachers.