

What a semester! I have always considered myself, as an educator, supportive and welcoming to any student who walks through my door. I now feel as though I've had blinders on and they've been lifted! I reread my cultural narrative from the beginning of the semester, and I was surprised that it was a little superficial. There was nothing bad about it, but it makes me realize that before this class, I looked only on the surface of multicultural education, rather than delving as deeply into exploring the ideas as I should have.

### **Philosophy of Multicultural Education**

As I said in the introduction, I have found over the course of the semester that I need to look deeper into multicultural education. Instead of just "accepting" all students, I need to continue to actively learn and grow *with* my students. I think this semester should just be the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. To ensure that all students are safe and supported in my room, I need to learn about what makes them who they are, in terms of their racial, ethnic, or cultural identity. It is important to understand cultural difference, and to do this, teachers need to be educated. Through the books we've read this semester and our wonderfully insightful class discussions, I am learning more about the cultural experiences that students may come to my classroom with. It can be a bit overwhelming, wondering how I will ever learn it all! It is important to remember, however, that you may never "learn it all." Half of the challenge and responsibility is to be aware that you need to learn, and to be willing to learn. I've also opened my mind when it comes to considering what students need multicultural education. Previously, I've tended to think mainly in terms of race. I now realize that there are so many other students under this umbrella, such as different genders, sexual orientation, exceptionality, or social class.

### **Challenges of the Philosophy**

One area I need to focus on improving, in regards to my philosophy of education, is understanding of familial roles in students' lives. I am learning that there are all types of parental situations that I may not be aware of. For example, in *Why Do All the Black Kids Sit Together in the Cafeteria?*, by Beverly Tatum, I learned that the formation of racial identity can be a lifelong process. That may mean that the parents of my students need just as much support and multicultural education as their children do. I would really like to encourage my school to start holding multicultural nights—even just a type of social gathering for families of all cultures. I would like to see this become a routine, rather than something that may occur just for a specific special occasion. Now the challenge to myself is to *make* it happen, rather than just thinking about it!

In this same regard, I also think I need to focus on a stronger focus of multicultural education with my colleagues. We have had several professional development, = with Dr. Tiffany Powell, the district's former diversity coordinator, and Mrs. Emily Dossett, the district's ESOL coordinator. However, if we are only occasionally talking about it, then I'm afraid we are only occasionally thinking about it.

### **Personal Accomplishments**

As I said at the beginning of this reflection, I am now truly thinking about things I just didn't consider before. For example, I have a list of books I like to read aloud to my students every year. I have always given thought to the gender of the main character, so that I try to get a variation of boys and girls. Have I tried to choose main characters with different cultural beliefs? To be completely honest, I never really thought about it. Now, however, it is in my consciousness and it is something I'm considering when choosing a book to read. When I am choosing books out of the Scholastic book orders for my classroom library, I am looking for books that celebrate all cultures and all different types of families. While I know these are small examples, they feel big to me because it truly feels like I have grown so much this semester. It's not as if I actively did not choose books that celebrated other ethnicities, races, or cultures; I just never considered it, and that is still a form of racism.

When we first wrote the Cultural Narrative at the beginning of the semester, and when we had the class discussion about our own cultural and racial identities, I struggled. I thought, "Do white people have a cultural or racial identity?!" Pamela Perry's *Shades of White* was the book that came closest to explaining this for me. There are many white people in the world who just never give any thought to this question. After watching *The Color of Fear* video and listening to class lectures, I realized several things. First of all, other races do not have the luxury of not having to think about their racial identity. People of color are faced with it every day in a multitude of ways. Second, I realized that before I can truly understand and integrate multicultural education into my classroom climate, I need to explore my own culture. I cannot help my young students explore their cultural past if I am confused about my own. I consider it a personal accomplishment that I am thinking about these things instead of going along with my blinders on again!

### **Goals and Tasks Looking Forward**

This semester has really made me reevaluate everything in my teaching. Similar to how my educational technology classes have made me rethink the way I teach, so has this multicultural issues class. As with technology, multicultural education cannot be one small part of the day, but must be closely interwoven throughout the entire day and through every bit of the curriculum. From the posters hanging on the wall of my classroom, to the websites I have available to my students, to the guests I invite into my classroom to speak, I will always be thinking of ways to bring in information and ideas from other cultures.

I also pledge to start having the hard conversations, whether in my classroom or out. I've learned that it is necessary to talk about race and identity with my students, and that I need to encourage them to explore and celebrate differences in themselves and in others. I also need to have those conversations out "in the real world." If I can change the way my friends, family, or colleagues think about

multicultural education and racial differences, then I have at least made an impact in a small part.

I would just like to end this self-reflection with a "Thank you!" to Dr. Stoney. It has been many years since I have had a class that forced me to truly examine myself and my teaching practices, and I know that my students will be the better for it. The class discussions were an invaluable experience, and I have taken away so much from these few short months.