Schnell, Eugene

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Reflective Essay

Diversity in the College Classroom has been a wonderful experience! I took this class so that I could learn how to be a better teacher in a group setting. I certainly have picked up techniques that will allow me to be a better educator outside of the one-on-one. The creation of a diversity statement, for example was something that I was unaware of prior to this course. Looking back on previous syllabi, it sometimes showed up yet I never noticed until this semester. Those statements, however, established the tone of student discussion. By setting the tone, students are more likely to have more civil and productive disagreements, even when talking about more controversial topics. As I continue my entry into academia. the inclusion of a diversity statement in any future syllabi I create is a must. Those learning from me will better understand the expectations that come with participating in a course led by me.

Another major educational moment was the discussion of “hot” moments in the classroom. The topic appeared more than once and impacted me considerably. Handling less than pleasant situations was a major fear of mine when considering teaching. Will I be able to handle an intense disagreement? Am I emotionally able to handle a sharp response from a student. By reading, participating in exercises, and presenting, I came to acquire techniques I aim to use for the future. Asking questions that disarm the awkwardness of a situation is smart and something that I would not have thought of previously. Additionally, the conveying of ground rules is another smart idea. I learned about the power of ground rules while training as a professional facilitator. Yet, I did not think that similar tactics could work with college students. The readings from this course showed that I was clearly wrong.

Outside of the diversity statement and “hot” moments in the classroom, the Engagement with Diversity assignment was another turning point within this course. To be honest, I had incredibly difficulty reflecting on when I was a perpetrator. Given I have tried to be more socially aware in recent years, recalling moments where I made a mistake was hard. In my ponderance, however, I began to recall plenty of moments where I may have said or done something that could have been perceived as ignorant of someone’s diversity. The story of the student with disabilities, the one talked about in the Engagement with Diversity paper, comes to mind. I realized that I needed to know more about how to prevent moments that could be perceived as microaggressions.

Thus, when the class eventually got to microaggressions, I paid close attention to tips on how to prevent such language and/or behavior. Paying closer attention, I came to realize that when recommending authors or recommending books, I often only mentioned male authors. I know fantastic women historians and yet their names were not brought up often. In order to be a better historian, I had to work refer on mentioning the writings of women in the profession. In the end, there were still microaggressions being committed by me. In the future, there will be more focus on this subject in order to make sure there is improvement.

Having now completed the course, several questions for the future come to mind. What further research could I do on microaggressions? If I know more about microaggressions and their origins, I can continue to improve in my language and behavior. How could I as a future faculty member call out colleagues and/or superiors that engage in behavior that could be intentionally or unintentionally discriminatory? A difficult problem can arise when a colleague does something discriminatory. Knowing how to approach the problem and seek an appropriate solution would be most helpful. How can I teach concepts from this course to fellow graduate colleagues in the history department? The lessons from Diversity in the College Classroom are too valuable to not be taught in every department. If the opportunity arises, I would like to participate in further spreading this knowledge to the history department. How can I teach concepts from this course to undergraduate history students? If undergraduates learn how to better handle diversity then healthier and more impactful discussions could emerge. With more discussions like these, college students would have a better educational experience. While there are not many questions, these four do require considerable research. With deeper personal research, I will be able to apply what I learned to teaching situations many years down the road.

Diversity in the Classroom has been an incredibly informative experience that has provided a wide array of tools. These tools help create a healthier educational environment. The course material also helped me reflect upon my own transgressions and how to rectify them in some way. By continuing to improve my behavior, there will be more opportunities to change students’ lives for the better. The hope is to perhaps one day teach a course just like this. I want people around me to learn what I have acquired from this class. If I am successful in teaching people techniques, then higher education will continue to make small improvements. And stronger higher education means a healthier tomorrow for us and for those after us.