

Closing Reflection of Internship and Future Goals

Curating a classroom that acts as a safe space for all students is one of the things that is most important for my future classroom. This can be done by creating relationships with my students, having a no tolerance policy for bullying and making sure that my students feel represented in my room.

One of the most important steps to creating a safe space for all students is relationship building. Rita Pierson famously said that “kids don’t learn from people they don’t like.” A similar thing can be said for feeling safe, students won’t feel safe in your classroom if they don’t like you. As you build relationships with your students they will start to feel like they can open up to you. In my internship I was surprised by how quickly I was able to form relationships with my students. After the first couple of weeks I had students coming up to me to talk about different facets of their lives. This included some sensitive topics including their home lives and other deeply personal things. When you build a relationship students know that you can be a trusted adult.

I have worked very hard to create a classroom where students respect each other. At times this can be difficult but it is deeply important to me as a teacher. Students will not feel comfortable taking risks if they are afraid that they will be ridiculed for it. One of the ways that I do this is by making sure that students do not make fun of other student’s questions. In my internship, this has happened a couple of times and I always remind the class that people learn in different ways and there are no questions. I also make sure that students do not get made fun of for the way that they pronounce words. I have a student in one of my history classes who is an English language learner. During our World War II unit he had a hard time pronouncing Hitler’s name. When he did this, I would not say anything. I knew what he was trying to say and while I

would pronounce Hitler's name correctly in my response I would not make it a bigger deal than that. When students started to say something about it I told them that we do not make fun of people who mispronounce words. I think that if I had let the comments about the way this student pronounces words continue he eventually would have gotten discouraged and stopped asking questions. This would have been a detriment to the class as a whole as his questions led to great class discussions. I also make sure that my students know that derogatory comments of all types are not acceptable in the classroom. Sometimes students think that they are being funny or making jokes when in reality they are being offensive. In these situations, I make sure to educate the students on why their behavior is inappropriate because when students know better they can do better. Taking a stand against these behaviors lets students know that everyone is welcome in my classroom.

Making sure that all students are represented in the classroom can make all students feel like the classroom is a space for them. I think that this is vital in the classroom. Students deserve to see themselves in the classroom curriculum. As a history teacher I have always thought that it was important to bring diverse voices into the classroom. Too often the History we teach in our classes comes from a particular lens that prioritizes the voices of a few. Bringing in different perspectives is important because all students should see people who look like them in history. In one of my history classes I have a student who is a first generation immigrant from Haiti. Whenever possible I bring up Haiti in class with the student's permission because it makes her excited. I teach US history, so I'm not able to do it super often, but it comes up occasionally. For example, when we were learning about World War Two I taught that several countries including Haiti helped provide the United States with materials during the war. In my world language class it is easier to include diverse students when we learn about the cultures associated with each

language. Last week we started learning Spanish and a student who is normally fairly shy and reserved asked if he could be the teacher for a lesson and teach everyone the numbers in Spanish. It was really cool to see him start to come out of his shell. Aside from classroom curriculum it is also important to me that my classroom library is diverse and students have the opportunity to read books about people who look like them. I have already started going through my books and noting whose voices are missing from my own personal collection. Students should not feel like their voice is any less or more important than any other students. I think that having representation in the classroom is a great way to make sure that nobody is unintentionally told this.

My goal for next year is to continue the work that I have done in my internship classroom to make an inclusive and safe space. I know that as a first-year teacher I will have a lot of different things to do, but it is important to me to make time for this. The relationship building that I get to do as a teacher is one of my favorite parts of the job. Classroom inclusivity is a huge part of this goal. For the last several months I have been doing a lot of research to help me set up my classroom library. I want to make sure that all students feel represented by the books that I choose to have.

There are a lot of students who use school as an escape from whatever is occurring in their outside lives. For this reason, it is important to me that my classroom is viewed by my students as a safe place. All students deserve to feel safe in school and it is hard to expect students to learn in a classroom that they do not feel safe in. In my internship I have tried to make my classroom a safe space by building relationships, cultivating a culture of respect between my students, and including all of my students in and outside of the school curriculum.