Appreciating and Valuing Diversity

Diversity in the classroom defined

Having a diverse group of students simply means recognizing that all the people are unique in their own way. Their differences could consist of their reading level, athletic ability, cultural background, personality, religious beliefs, and the list goes on. There has always been diversity in the classroom, but in today’s society it is important to embrace it and make positive use of it. Teachers should value diversity and they need to model this attitude to their students. When people value diversity, they recognize and respect the fact that people are different and that these differences is generally a good thing. For example, when attempting to solve a problem, it is better to assemble a diverse team with many skills and many different ways of approaching the problem than it is to assemble a team that has all their strength concentrated in one area.

What can teachers do to encourage, value, and promote diversity?

Teachers must provide students with an environment that is conducive to learning. If a student feels uncomfortable, unsafe, or not respected, then their chances of success in that class dramatically decrease. Also, as our society becomes more diverse, it is important that students learn to value and use diversity to the greater good. Teachers already have a number of roles in the classroom; yet, valuing diversity is one of the most important ones a teacher must fill. Below is a list of just a few things that teachers can do to create an environment where each student feels valued and respected.

- Take the time to learn about your students' background, interests, and learning style.
  - This will allow you to create an environment that is conducive to each individual student.
- Allow time for the students to learn about each other and gain an appreciation for the diversity they bring to the classroom.
  - Remind them how boring it would be if we were all alike and there were no differences among us to make each person unique.
  - Teach students that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. When working in teams encourage students to take advantage of the strengths of the team members in order to produce the best possible results.
- Bring in different people to the class as resources that students might be able to connect with.
  - Search out people that are different from yourself and that might share certain qualities with your students.
  - Students need role models. Many times when they see they are connected in some way to a person they will be more apt to listen and learn from them.
- Never tolerate bullying, teasing, and other put-down behavior at any time in the classroom.
  - Implement a "zero tolerance" for anything that is disrespectful, hurtful, or intolerant of diversity.