

Beyond *Celebrating Diversity*: Twenty Things I Can Do to Be a Better Multicultural Educator

by Paul C. Gorski <gorski@edchange.org>
for EdChange <<http://www.edchange.org>>
Revised September 18, 2010

1. I can learn to pronounce each student's full name correctly. No student should feel the need to shorten or change her or his name in order to make it easier for me or anyone else to pronounce it. Being sure that I do not contribute to a student feeling she or he needs to do so is the first step toward being inclusive.
2. I can sacrifice the safety of my comfort zone by building a process for continually assessing, reflecting upon, and challenging my biases, prejudices, and socializations and how they influence my expectations for, and relationships with, each student, family, and colleague.
3. I can review all learning materials, ensuring that they are free of bias whether in implicit or explicit forms. When I find bias in required materials, I can commit to encouraging students to recognize and analyze it.
4. I can learn, and teach about, the ways people in the subject areas I teach have used their knowledge to advocate for either justice or injustice.
5. I can reject deficit ideology—the temptation to identify the problem of outcome inequalities (such as test scores) as *existing within* rather than as *pressing upon* disenfranchised communities. I will always keep in mind that such disparities do not result from supposed deficiencies in disenfranchised communities, but usually are, instead, symptoms of systemic educational and social conditions. This means, as well, that I must find solutions to these problems that focus, not on “fixing” disenfranchised communities, but on fixing those conditions and practices which disenfranchise communities.
6. I can teach about critical multicultural issues such as racism, sexism, poverty, and heterosexism. And despite false perceptions that younger students are not “ready” for these conversations, I will begin doing so at the youngest ages because students from disenfranchised communities already are experiencing these problems, and witnessing their parents or guardians experiencing them, at the youngest ages.
7. I can understand the relationship between *intent* and *impact*. Often, and particularly when I'm in a situation in which I experience some level of privilege, I have the luxury of referring and responding only to what I have intended, regardless of the impact I've had on somebody. I must take responsibility for and learn from my impact because most individual-level oppression is unintentional. But unintentional oppression hurts just as much as intentional oppression.
8. I can reject the myth of color-blindness. As uncomfortable as it may be to admit, I know that I react differently when I'm in a room full of people who share many dimensions of my identity than when I'm in a room full of people who are very different from me. I must be open and honest about this reality, because those shifts inevitably inform the experiences of people in my classes. In addition, color-blindness denies people validation of their whole person.
9. I can keep in mind that some students do not enjoy the same level of access to educational materials and resources, such as computers and the Internet, as other students. I will be thoughtful, therefore, about how I assign homework.

10. I can build coalitions with teachers who are different from me in terms of race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, home language, class, (dis)ability, and so on. These can be valuable relationships for feedback and collaborative problem-solving. At the same time, though, I must not rely on other people to identify my weaknesses. In particular, in the areas of my identity through which I experience privilege, I must not rely on people from disenfranchised groups to teach me how to improve myself (which is, in and of itself, a practice of privilege).
11. I can improve my skills as a facilitator, so when issues such as racism and heterosexism arise in the classroom, I can take advantage of the resulting educational opportunities.
12. I can elicit anonymous feedback from my students and, when I do, I can model a willingness to be changed by their presence to the same extent they are changed by mine.
13. I can avoid *essentializing* students from identity groups different from my own. Despite the popularity of workshops and literature that suggest that we need to know only one dimension of a student's identity in order to know her or his learning needs, culture, and proclivities, such a position is dangerously simplistic. Similarly, despite popular belief, there is no such thing as a singular, predictable "culture of poverty" or Asian culture. All girls and women do not share a single learning style. One's racial identity is not a reasonable predictor of her or his learning preferences or competencies. I will refuse these simplifications and focus, instead, on individual students' interests and needs.
14. I can offer an integrated multicultural curriculum, not just during special months or celebrations, but all year, every day.
15. I can understand inequity, not just as an interpersonal issue, but as a systemic issue. Although I might not consider the fight against global sexism or world poverty as within my purview, part of understanding students is understanding the ways in which conditions and inequities within the education system itself affect them.
16. I can encourage my students to think critically and ask critical questions about all of the information they receive, including that which they receive from me.
17. I can challenge myself to take personal responsibility before looking for fault elsewhere. For example, if I have one student who is falling behind or being disruptive, I will consider what I am doing or not doing that might be contributing to their disengagement before problematizing their behavior or effort.
18. I can work to ensure that students from disenfranchised communities are not placed unjustly into lower academic tracks. I can fight, as well, to get them into gifted and talented programs. Better yet, considering that two decades of research demonstrate that tracking benefits only the five percent of highest achievers, I can fight tracking altogether.
19. I can fight for equity for *all* underrepresented or disenfranchised students. Equity is not a game of choice; if I am to claim that I am committed to education equity, I do not have the luxury of choosing who does or does not have access to it. For example, I cannot fight effectively for racial equity while I fail to confront gender inequity. And I never can be a real advocate for gender equity if I duck the responsibility for ensuring equity for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, etc. When I find myself justifying my inattention to any group of disenfranchised students due to the worldview or value system into which I was socialized, I know that it is time to reevaluate that worldview or value system.
20. I can *celebrate* myself as an educator. I can, and should, also celebrate every moment I spend in self-reflection regarding my practice, however challenging, because it will make me a better educator. And *that* is something to celebrate!