

Diversity

Collin M. Barnes

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Professor Woo

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All of my life, I have been engrossed in the idea of diversity. My early childhood through high school years taught me that no two people are the same, and I have often found myself completely consumed by diversity and the many unique lessons that it has to offer. These lessons have not only taught me to see the world differently, but also to reexamine myself and to truly find out who I am and what I believe.

Growing up in a small orchard town in the middle of Washington, I found myself in the midst of a cultural melting pot. My little high school was about 1/3 Russian/Ukrainian, 1/3 Mexican (most of whom were illegal immigrants), and 1/3 Caucasian. I was suddenly considered part of a minority group, and it gave me the unique opportunity to see what life was like from their point of view. After this shocking realization, I found that minority groups are not out to take advantage of the government systems to gain money (although some people do), but rather to work hard and gain a respectable job to support their families. An example of this could be seen with one of my good friends whom we will call John Doe. John was the quarterback of our football team and was one of the most studious people I knew. It was common knowledge among the teachers and students that John and his family were illegal immigrants, but no one said anything for the simple fact that John was genuinely a hard worker. While some other people in his exact situation worked the system to gain free handouts from the government, Doe took this as an opportunity to do something no one else in his family ever even dreamed of; to gain an education and earn a good-paying job. To this day, John is working in a decently sized restaurant and paying for his tuition at Big Bend Community College. Although culturally diverse and faced with circumstances that many people frown upon, John taught me that it is not the skin or the region from which

one comes from that makes a person, but it is rather the inner drive to overcome profound obstacles that really makes them count.

Through my experiences with him, John taught me that diversity is essential in any sort of learning condition. Standard III states that, “The competent teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.” While John showed me that it is unsafe to trust stereotypes about people of different cultures, I learned through my experiences with him that people often look at the cover of the book and think they know the whole story. I can testify that this is not the case. John’s actions gave me insight as of how to become a better teacher, mentor, and friend to the students that I will be teaching. He has taught me ways to make lesson plans “adapted to diverse learners,” as well as techniques for breaking through the stereotypical molds that many people find themselves in by keeping an open mind and viewing everybody as an equal. I have learned that students learn differently based on their upbringing, and that by keeping an open mind and treating everyone equal, one can break down cultural barriers that earlier seemed impassible.

My upbringing and high school experiences have taught me that cultures are not something to view as an obstacle, but rather to utilize as a tool to expand our horizons. Often we view cultures with discriminating stereotypes, when in fact, the only discrimination to be found is seen in our own actions. By learning from these life-lessons, I have fulfilled the Illinois Professional Teaching Standard III and have thus proven myself worthy to converse with culturally diverse crowds without finding any fault or faction based on preconceived notions or stereotypes. After living through these times and maintaining an open mind culturally, I can truly say that I can understand how

“students differ in their approaches to learning and [can create] instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.”