



by Anita M. Cellucci, December 2019

"Anti-bias education is an approach to teaching and learning designed to increase understanding of differences and their value to a respectful and civil society and to actively challenge bias, stereotyping and all forms of discrimination in schools and communities. It incorporates inclusive curriculum that reflects diverse experiences and perspectives, instructional methods that advance all students' learning, and strategies to create and sustain safe, inclusive and respectful learning communities."

— Anti-Defamation League

I recently attended two days of workshops with Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. I walked away with a clearer understanding of the work that needs to be done to move our schools toward anti-bias practices. I also walked away a bit overwhelmed with thoughts about having these critical conversations with my colleagues and the outcomes that might come from these interactions. As challenging as these issues are to confront, I know that this is all necessary work that each of us must contribute to and grow with.

At the start of the training, we were introduced to the thought from Maurianne Adams, "Without truly valuing diversity, we cannot effectively address issues of injustice. Without addressing issues of injustice, we cannot truly value diversity." It made me think about how intersected and intentional our curriculum must be in order to address equity, diversity, and inclusion. If we spend time teaching issues of diversity it is then imperative to focus on the injustice issues and to give opportunities for students to learn about injustice in all of its forms. There are many ways to do this and Teaching Tolerance is providing standards for lesson building as well as protocols to assist with the critical conversations within our educator communities.

In the time since the professional development, I have been gathering the resources that I have already had access to and thinking deeply about how to bring it together to collaborate with my classroom colleagues. This brought me to my ideas around how to delve into this work if you are at the beginning. It is imperative that in order to begin to understand and shift our thinking, we must think about our own implicit biases. If we do not do so, our subconscious bias will interfere with how we respond to others.

As we begin our individual education around these topics, the following are some ideas of where to start with reflective practice:

1. Do a classroom audit to ensure that the space fosters an inclusive environment while allowing for diversity, equity, and student empowerment:>

- Does the set up of the room foster collaboration and safety?
- Are the posters and books in the room representative of a diverse environment?
- Have you created a contract/norms with students and is it visible to all students?

2. Create a brave space for dialogue to empower students to take ownership of their lived experiences and their individual learning:

- Is the space inclusive to all races, genders, abilities, immigration statuses, and lived experiences?
- Does the space allow for student expression and positive challenges?
- Are there practices in place that allow students to hold each other accountable while also learning from each other?

3. Reflect on fairness, equity, and cultural awareness:

- Rethink participation norms: what practices are in place to model equity and inclusion?

- Gender, culture, ability, and communication style can affect the ability to participate in a group setting
- Is there a norm set for actively addressing bias, bullying, exclusion, and disrespect that honors all students?

4. Learn about restorative justice: repairing harm and restoring relationships vs. punishment by building empathy through the following practices:

- Mediation
- Peacemaking circles
- Conferencing
- Classroom discussions using anti-bias practices

From my own professional growth, professional development, critical conversations, and continued openness to vulnerability, I have learned about my own blind areas and how to confront these issues that colleagues across the country face, and what our students need from a culturally responsive teacher. As we continue together, we will find new ways to understand each other and to empower our students to oppose biased structures within our schools to participate in the creation of an equitable society.

Resources

Educator Amplifiers, <https://amplifier.org/call-for-educators/>

Teaching Tolerance, <https://www.tolerance.org/>

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