

Model #1

EDTEP 562

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Last Assignment *Future Classroom*

### Looking Forward

According to the US Department of Education, out of the 5.2% of African Americans enrolling in high school, 7.5% of that number dropped out of high school in the 2004-05 school year in Washington State. I strongly believe that high drop out rates within minority populations are highly correlated to the lack of multicultural curriculum within the American education system. I have decided to obtain my Masters in Education in order to have the opportunity to study and research the effects of a more diverse curriculum on a student's education. I plan to shape my classroom to not only benefit students who have a high achieving status in the classroom and society but so it also benefits those who struggle to conform to societal norms. I am a realist and I know that not every student will achieve what I know they are capable of. I am idealistic enough, however, to expect every student to do so. I hope to shape my classroom into an environment of high achievement and personal strides; where all my students feel they have done their personal best every day.

My goal as a high school English teacher is to improve our education system, for minority students in particular, who historically have had the most to lose and the most to gain. A large gap exists between those students who have received a well-balanced education and those that lose interest, flunk out, fail, drop out, or graduate ill-equipped from high school. One of the reasons this gap exists is because today's curriculum includes books about and by people that have nothing in common with the growing number of diverse students within American

classrooms. Minority students cannot identify with the book's characters or authors because there is no shared culture or history.

It's important to show students of diverse races that writers of merit, with a culture and history just like their own, do exist. Consequently, in my classroom I plan to integrate diverse literature and assignments with those of canonized curriculum. For instance, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* could be taught in conjunction with Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. These make for a good comparison because one is about a young white boy while the other a young black woman. Both are good examples of voice, setting and dialects. Endless class discussions and analysis are sure to ensue as students start to identify how English is used to access and gain power. This provides a great lesson in audience and the different genres of writing. A diverse curriculum helps students better relate their literary findings to their perceptions of life in America and prevents them from feeling excluded from their education. Their culture is given a sense of worth and students are given a reason to stay in school to learn more about how their ancestors helped shaped America into what it is today. The English classroom is transformed from a forcible routine into a place where all students are comfortable creating, expanding, and exploring ideas.

I also believe in expecting high standards from all students. "[T]eacher expectations significantly influence the quality of learning opportunities provided to students" (Gay ,57) Too many times teachers give up on students who continually don't do the work assigned and act out in class. The less teachers expect out of their students, the less the students will do. " If teachers expect students to be high or low achievers, they will act in ways that cause this to happen" (Gay, 57). This becomes a vicious circle as the student translates this attitude of underachievement into life. Until there is a demand for that student to perform, the performance

will not be there. Part of making this happen and creating an environment where students respond well to high expectations is really knowing your students. In high school teenagers are going through a multitude of changes, they neither want nor know what to do with. If I put in the effort and time to get to know my student at the beginning of the year and throughout the year I can create an atmosphere of trust and recognition that students will appreciate. I want to “demonstrate concerns for the students’ emotional, physical, economic, and interpersonal conditions as well. In so doing, a consistently caring climate [can be] created that [will make] students more willing to participate in learning tasks and encourage higher levels of achievement” (Gay 41 ( Jones, 1981; Siddle-Walker, 1993; Sowell, 1976)). I hope to do this by implementing personal posters about themselves and their families that will be displayed around the room. A personal info sheet with not only goals and things they struggle with, but contact info to those I should inform of the students progress. Teenagers change so rapidly even in a year, “Arguably at no other time in development are so many factors in flux. Change is physical, emotional, and intellectual capacities are manifold” (Guardia, 193) so I also hope to have semester conferences with my students to check in with their work and with them personally. I want my students to know that I care when they are struggling, so they are not afraid to come to me for help. It also gives them a responsibility to do so, if I let them know they have the power over their education and their grades. “Self Determination Theory suggests that if teens can feel autonomy, competence, and belongingness in school, they will experience more intrinsic motivation to learn, they will more deeply value and engage school relevant tasks, and they will experience greater well being” (La Guardia 200)

I am a true believer that not every student is going to become an English teacher. Not every student really likes or does well in English, a subject I have always loved. It is my

responsibility, then, to not only make sure what I teach is taught in a way conducive to many people's learning styles but also in a way that students who aren't the best in English can see their own personal progress. To do this I plan to allow them a certain amount of autonomy and choice when it comes to how I assess them. "Intrinsic motivation refers to the innate tendency to explore, take interest in novelty and challenges, and stretch one's capacities" (La Guardia, 201). If someone wants to write a play, or create a power point, or create an interpretative sculpture, I want to have a flexibility built into my classroom to allow him or her to do so. I feel the students will be much more engaged with what they are learning and also it will help them understand material that they might not have before. Life is a process; no one ever does anything perfectly on the first try. I believe that learning is a process as well; it is not a true measure of student learning to expect them to do perfectly at something their first try. Revision will be built into every assignment the students are given so they can improve work that they feel is not their best reflection of what they know. I also will require that all students keep the old and revised assignments and projects throughout the year in a portfolio. They will also be asked to reflect on each assignment and say how they feel they improved, what they think they did best on, and what they plan to continue working with. In the student's personal meetings with me I hope that we can reflect on their portfolio together, and that the student can see their personal improvement in areas they had struggled with. No not every student is going to become an English teacher but I think every student should know that they can succeed in anything they set their mind to.

As teachers we are helping shape members of society. In my classroom want to give my students the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in an uncontrolled environment away from the walls of a classroom. To do this, the tasks and activities I have the students engage in must be a reflection of tasks and activities that they will engage in out in society. There will be

no time in a person's life where they will not be asked to work with others. Because of this there is a real benefit to group work if it is done right. Students not only learn information from myself, but they also learn valuable information from their peers. Seeing themselves and their peers as authority figures creates a classroom environment of continual learning. Every student needs to feel that he or she has something valuable to contribute to the class's learning. To get students to this point, once I have gotten to know them I am going to put them into groups that they will stay in the rest of the year. Whenever the class does group work they will be in these groups. "Cooperative base groups are long-term cooperative learning groups with stable membership whose primary responsibilities are to help students provide each other with support, encouragement, and assistance in completing assignments and hold each other accountable for striving to learn" (Johnson et. al, 16). The idea behind this is that eventually the students will be comfortable enough with each other to rely on each other's knowledge, to motivate every member and to be responsible for the entire group's growth. I hope that students will eventually realize the knowledge is not outside of them; that they themselves create this knowledge. I hope that this will give them the confidence to become successful and responsible members of society who make well thought out and insightful decisions about life. Students who have a confidence and pride in the knowledge they hold and create in the classroom will be able to transfer that to the halls of the high school and the community beyond. "[O]n the basis of school experiences, teens can learn to see themselves as able or incompetent, as belonging or outcast, as personally empowered or weak and with out voice" ( La Guardia, 200) Self esteem is something high schoolers are just beginning to grapple with having a confidence and pride in themselves will make those self esteem issues just a little bit easier to deal with.

I was nervous coming into this program directly from my undergrad. I was nervous because I was so young and I also was not an English major like the other students in my cohort. As I go through my teaching experiences and as I discuss readings and our ideas for the future, I realize what an enormous advantage I have by being both young and not an English major. High school was not that long ago for me, and I remember being the quiet, insecure, black girl who sat in the back of the classroom and almost cried anytime a teacher would ask for participation. Being so close to that experience and having knowledge of what would have made my high school experience a more fruitful one, I have come up with the plan outlined above. Minority students need to feel like they are a part of the classroom. It doesn't matter if they are a minority because of their gender, race, learning ability, or sexual preference. Students who are different deserve a good education as well. As a lover of literature it will be hard for me to relate to students who don't appreciate it as I do, I need to do my best to reach every student and help them connect to the material in a meaningful way. To do this I have to know and understand them not only as students but also as people. It is my duty as a teacher to create responsible citizens and give my student's the tools, the knowledge and the skills they need to succeed in the world we live in. Teaching is big job and it is easy to become jaded and pessimistic and regret taking on such a big job. The really good teachers, the teachers who make a difference, however, live their lives with out regret and though they are realists never forget the benefits of a little idealism every now and then.