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Diversity

Diversity is a beautiful thing, and living in a diverse country like the United States is truly a blessing. Jimmy Carter said, “We have become not a melting pot, but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams.” This quote sums up my beliefs about diversity very well. Diversity in education is not about trying to make everyone think and learn the same way, it is about the beauty of the individual students and their unique way of learning.

I grew up in a small town in Iowa, so I did not grow up with ethnic diversity, but I did grow up with many other kinds of diversity. As a teacher, it is important to remember that ethnicity is not the only type of diversity. Studying diversity made me realize that diversity is all around us no matter where we are. Diversity includes ethnicity, culture, language, socioeconomic status, gender, learning methods, age, sexual preference, appearance, beliefs, and maturity. Diversity is what makes us unique. I grew up in a Christian home, and was taught that God created every person special, and that I need to treat each of them as I would treat God himself because people are created in God’s image.

Diversity is not something that must be overcome; it is something that we can use to create, as Jimmy Carter said, “a beautiful mosaic.” As an art teacher, this applies to me quite distinctly. I realize that all of my students will be different, they will have different ways of expressing themselves, they will have different ways of learning, so I must be prepared to deal with those, and I must plan ahead, and be careful not to prefer one way more than another. Marian Wright Edelman speaks of Matthew 19:14 when she says, “When Jesus Christ asked little children to come to him, he didn't say only rich children, or White children, or children with two-parent families, or children who didn't have a mental or physical handicap. He said, „Let all

children come unto me.”” In the same way, I must emulate Jesus and treat all of my students with the individual respect they deserve, and with the unique help they need.

Developing a healthy view of diversity is a lifelong endeavor that grows each time you meet a new person. Learning to appreciate each other’s differences takes a lot of practice and effort at first. I have been learning this skill here at Trinity. The student body here is very diverse, and I am learning to appreciate the different views and ideas of people in my classes, and the different cultures of the people in the dorms through interaction with them. I am also learning to appreciate diversity in my teacher aiding placements. In both of the schools that I have aided, there is a wide variety of children from different ethnicities, to different learning styles, to different religions, and the list could go on. Learning to appreciate each of the children I have worked with took effort at first, but it is becoming easier as I deal with more diversity in the classroom. When appreciating a student’s differences, it is important to let them know that you appreciate them, but in doing so, a teacher must let every student know that. Creating a “culture of caring” in the classroom is one way to do that. Asking students about their opinions, and their culture, and giving the students the ability to share their experiences with the class is important. In doing this, it is important to emphasize respect from and for all of my future students.

My studies in education at Trinity have helped me to prepare to adapt to students’ diversity by helping me to understand different teaching strategies and methods so that I have the knowledge to implement methods that will enable a diverse group of students to learn effectively. It has also taught me how to adapt, compromise, and accommodate for the different student’s needs. I have also learned that in teaching, I will also have to know how to interact with parents, colleagues, and communities which also are very diverse. I must also apply the

respect and dignity to them along with my students. I must never assume anything about someone; that can only hurt them and myself. Instead, I must have an open mind and I must appreciate their differences just as I do in my classroom. After all, “Diversity is not about how we differ. Diversity is about embracing one another's uniqueness” (Ola Joseph).