

# DADDExpress

Volume 31, Number 4 • Fall 2020



A publication of the DIVISION ON AUTISM AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, a unit of the Council for Exceptional Children  
*Focusing on individuals with autism, intellectual disability, and related disabilities*

## Teachers' Corner

### Intersectional Pedagogy



Tracy McKinney  
Georgia State University



Peggy Schaefer Whitby  
University of Arkansas

Promoting diversity and intersectional pedagogy within the classroom is critical for successful teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2009). By focusing on diversity and intersectionality as teachers, we create environments that support all learners and develop trusting relationships that enhance learning. While this is necessary, it is not always easy. Until recently, intersectionality and the impact on diverse learners has not been consistently addressed in teacher education programs (Gay, 2000). In this Teachers' Corner, we provide three steps to assist teachers in enhancing intersectional pedagogy in the classroom.

#### Step 1: Be Intentional

As we address issues of intersectionality as a means to better reach our students and families, it is important for teachers to rethink their pedagogy. We need to design our lesson plans to include diversity, differences, collaboration, and relationship development across diversity (Gay, 2004). By planning each lesson with intention, teachers do not need to add something or feel like they have yet another thing to do. Many times, the good intention of adding activities (e.g., during Black History month or during PRIDE week) can be fragmented and fail to teach the big ideas that can facilitate inclusion and change (GLSEN, 2019). By rethinking our pedagogy and changing how we teach, students are able to see themselves and their values in education, thereby increasing engagement and benefit (Villegas et al., 2013; Waitoller & Thorius, 2016)

Another simple, but intentional, way to address intersectionality and inclusivity is by using preferred pronouns. Frequently, in the beginning of school/semester, teachers send home questionnaires asking about the student's favorite color, movie, book, etc. Some questionnaires even ask what the student would like to be called. Teachers should take it a step further to find out what pronouns their students prefer. This tiny,

yet mighty, step is simple and could really set the tone in the classroom for students and change the classroom dynamics in a positive way.

Next, it is important for educators to evaluate and choose curricula that are inclusive of multiple intersections (GLSEN, 2019). When assessing curricula, we need to determine if visuals and voices represent our students' diversity, if there are positive representations of diversity and collaboration, and if there are accurate and historical representations, not simply add-on suggestions at the end of lessons. It is also equally important to include novel representations. It is easy to continue to recycle the same five historical people year after year, grade after grade, but there are more stories to be heard apart from the important and familiar journeys of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Harvey Milk, Caesar Chavez, etc. This is important, as many times curricula fail to include key historical figures from diverse backgrounds.

Unfortunately, teachers may not have the final say in which curriculum is selected. Should this be the case, it is important for teachers to advocate for appropriate curricula that represent today's student body and point out discriminatory material or material that could adversely impact student engagement to the curricula specialist. If possible, join a committee on evaluating and choosing curricula for your district.

#### Step 2: Seize Teachable Moments

Frequently, situations occur in the classroom that can become teachable moments (GLSEN, 2019). Many times, teachers overlook these opportunities because they are uncomfortable, take time away from content, and teachers do not know how to address the issue. Address these teachable moments (GLSEN, 2019). Name the behavior: *That term or language is inappropriate.* Stop the behavior: *We do not use that language in the classroom.* Teach: *Tell the class why name calling is bullying and wrong.* Support the student who is being bullied, ask them what they need. Finally, follow school protocols on bullying and follow up to be sure the protocol is enforced. Unfortunately, some administrators do not see bullying related to diversity as a serious matter and may expect the student being bullied to "shake it off" or "toughen up." This is not acceptable and is a wonderful instance for you to advocate for your student (who is being bullied).

It is important for teachers to connect current social issues to past history as a means to engage students. For instance, the Black Lives Matter movement has spread quickly across school campuses nationwide (King, 2020). As teachers strive to create

more inclusive and intersectional classrooms, it is important for them to be familiar with the Black Lives Matter movement and help all students understand this social issue in terms of past history. Dismissing the movement may send a signal to Black students that their lives are not valued. It is nearly impossible to teach students who do not feel safe or trust their teacher.

Additionally, if teachers see problem behaviors or lack of understanding related to current social issues in the classroom, they can design specific lessons to address these topics. These can be considered tools for your toolkit.

### Step 3: Have a Toolkit of Activities

There are many resources available to teach students the concepts of oppression and privilege. Teachers can embed these activities throughout the year and align them with the curricula. Teachers can also use these activities to address teachable moments within the classroom. Table 1 provides a list of websites and resources with strategies and activities to help teachers address issues of diversity and build intersectional pedagogy in the classroom.

Differences make the classroom rich and interesting. However, teachers must acknowledge that intersectionality impacts student participation and learning, that they must understand their own bias and lead by example, and that they should strive

to build inclusive classrooms that are representative of the population they serve. By doing so, teachers increase their ability to reach all students. ■

### References

- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gay, G. (2004). Beyond Brown: Promoting equality through multicultural education. *Journal of Curriculum & Supervision*, 19(3), 193–216.
- GLSEN. (2019). *Developing LGBTQ inclusive classroom resources*. Retrieved on August 20, 2020, at [https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/GLSEN\\_LGBTQ\\_Inclusive\\_Curriculum\\_Resource\\_2019\\_0.pdf](https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/GLSEN_LGBTQ_Inclusive_Curriculum_Resource_2019_0.pdf).
- King, S. (2020). *Make change*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Villegas, L., Villegas, T., and Villegas, A. M. (2013). Preparing linguistically responsive teachers: Laying the foundation in preservice teacher education. *Theory Into Practice*, 52(2), 98–109.
- Waitoller, F. R., and Thorius, K. A. K. (2016). Cross-pollinating culturally sustaining pedagogy and universal design for learning: Toward an inclusive pedagogy that accounts for dis/ability. *Harvard Educational Review*, 86(3), 366–389.

**Table 1. Resources**

Resource	Website Address	Overview
The Century Foundation	<a href="https://tcf.org/content/report/fostering-intergroup-contact-diverse-schools-strategies-educators/">https://tcf.org/content/report/fostering-intergroup-contact-diverse-schools-strategies-educators/</a>	This article discusses racial integration in schools and the positive impact research has shown it has, but only when it goes beyond a “numbers game.” Some suggestions include focusing on equity and social justice through building supportive norms, involving the community life in schools, and building cross-racial friendships among students.
The Zinn Education Project	<a href="http://www.zinnedproject.org">www.zinnedproject.org</a>	Provides resources to teach about people’s history. The goal of the Zinn project is to provide resources to teach a more accurate, truthful version of history than what is presented in textbooks.
GLSEN	<a href="https://www.glsen.org/resources/educator-resources">https://www.glsen.org/resources/educator-resources</a>	This website discusses inclusion as it relates to LGBTQ students. One practice that would help teachers achieve this inclusion is ensuring there are ample mirrors (representation) and windows (ways in which students can learn more) in their curricula.
The National Seed Project (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity)	<a href="https://www.nationalseedproject.org/about-us/about-seed">https://www.nationalseedproject.org/about-us/about-seed</a>	The National Seed Project offers face-to-face immersive training in social justice from the education level to the societal level. The trainings can be residential or through a workshop. After the trainings, there is an online community for ongoing support to continue the difficult work and share resources.
UNC LGBTQ Center	<a href="https://lgbtq.unc.edu/">https://lgbtq.unc.edu/</a>	The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill LGBTQ Center provides workshops and resources for their students, faculty, and staff, as well as the greater community. They also provide a list of nationwide resources ( <a href="https://lgbtq.unc.edu/sites/lgbtq.unc.edu/files/documents/Online%20Resources_0.pdf">https://lgbtq.unc.edu/sites/lgbtq.unc.edu/files/documents/Online%20Resources_0.pdf</a> ).