**You don’t have to be an expert to make a difference**

By Vickie Trotter, Ed.D.

##### **June 2021: Action for racial equity**

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It is important that we as educators open your eyes, so we don’t just drift through these precious times in which we have the opportunity to make a profound impact on a child’s educational and life experience. responsibility

Study after study shows the single most important factor determining the quality of the education a child receives is the quality of his teacher. Quality is defined as the degree of excellence of something. I would like to extend the definition of the word quality by adding, the degree in which a teacher is able and willing to do whatever it takes to meet the individual needs of each child in their classroom determines the quality of teacher.

The quality of the teacher extends far beyond what we were taught in our educational studies. Far beyond our ability to implement and maneuver through curriculum so that we cover the content that we believe will help our students meet the standardized testing requirements.

Being a teacher of high quality starts with the desire to learn more about you as a person and educator and how your behaviors impact the children of whom you have been entrusted to 180 days each year. Children who you have chosen to teach. You were not appointed to teach, you made a conscious decision to teach in the district, the school, and the classroom you are in. Therefore, you have an obligation to increase your awareness of how children in your classroom are impacted by yours and others unconscious biases. In addition, how these unconscious biases influence a child's desire and willingness to learn in your classroom.

In her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain, Zaretta Hammond,* points out that educators also have a responsibility to create classroom systems that allow the teacher the opportunity to increase their knowledge of their student’s cultures. This knowledge should be used to build meaningful relationships and relevant learning opportunities students are able to easily connect to and thus learn from Additionally, teachers also have an obligation to understand how the larger social, political, and economic conditions create inequitable education outcomes and how important it is for educators to go above and beyond to ensure the children they have been entrusted with receive equitable and high levels of educational experiences that will help them overcome this ideas of systemic racism that has perpetuated our educational system for far too long.

The weight and gravity that has been placed on us as educators can feel overwhelming and sometimes impossible. No one is expecting you to be an expert. Please understand that we must start somewhere in order to get anywhere. There must be a beginning to our journey to make every child in our classroom feel important and valued.

As a teacher and principal, I know how important it is to connect new ideas and concepts to our current work. This helps to make sense of new expectations. I have referenced Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument (2013) to provide teachers with first steps to use as a start their journey towards making every child in their classroom feel important and valued.

1. As an educator, we have a professional responsibility to grow and develop professionally, participate in professional communities, and to learn about our individual students and their families. With that said, attend training and read books and articles to increase your knowledge of systemic racism and its impact on our school system. This will provide you with an opportunity to become familiar with the patterns of social and the political systems discriminating against a group of people based on race.
2. As an educator, we must reflect on our practice. Reflection provides us the opportunity to learn from our past mistakes. In beginning your journey to reflection, I suggest you start with exploring your purpose for teaching. Teaching Pre-K through 8th grade youth is a tremendous responsibility. You must know why you are here and answer the tough questions, is this my passion, is this where I am willing to do whatever it takes to make a difference. You must have a mindset that all students can learn and you must also recognize your responsibility to ensure this happens.
3. Learn more about your implicit biases and how your biases impact the way you respond, your interactions, your educational expectations, and how you feel about the students you serve.
4. Educators are also encouraged to establish classroom environments that foster positive interaction between students and adults and an environment where students know there are high expectations for them to learn. To help in creating caring classroom environments with high expectations, start by creating systems in your classroom that build community. Research the concept of a sense of belonging. Increase your awareness of how students of color struggle with identity and how they long to feel a sense of belonging and this need to belong is a cursor to whether or not they will embrace the idea of learning from you and in your classroom.
5. As educators, when planning and preparing instruction, we are to demonstrate our knowledge of our students by seeking information related to the way our students develop, the way they learn best, in addition to their interest and cultural heritage (Danielson, 2013). Seek opportunities to learn about your student’s lives outside of the school. Seek to know and understand their interest, traditions, what makes them think they way they do, why they behave the way they do, and family stressors. These cultural pieces will be a great foundation for you to build learning opportunities that incorporate your student’s rich backgrounds, thus increasing their ability to comprehend and become problem solvers.
6. There is much research on Culturally Responsive Teaching. As you prepare your lessons increase flexibility in your creation so that you are able to respond to the diverse needs of your students. Being a culturally responsive teachers calls for you to have high expectations for all students, use instructional approaches that allow students to engage in quality learning experiences that incorporate cognitive thinking, the use problems solving strategies, opportunities to engage in discussions with their peers, and infuse time for students to create ways to self-assess and monitor their own learning.(Hammond, 2015),

**Resources**

1. Systemic Racism: <https://youtu.be/YrHIQIO_bdQ>
2. What makes a great teacher: <https://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/what-makes-a-great-teacher/>
3. *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, by Zaretta Hammond
4. The Danielson Group, <https://danielsongroup.org/what-we-do/framework-teaching-0>