

Breaking the Ice: Cultural Connections Within Diverse Classrooms

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Activities

Abstract

At the beginning of a sixth-grade magnet school year at Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, students can filter in from as many fifty different feeder schools. This brings a wide array of ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic diversity to Piedmont Open Middle IB. Over sixty percent of the student population is black with a third of all students coming from low-income backgrounds. Besides countless personal worldviews and experiences, most will have never met their new cohort of classmates until their first day in the classroom. Research shows that using empathy can be critical to connecting with a diverse student population. Teaching at an International Baccalaureate (IB) school also brings the opportunity to intentionally expose and instill a global worldview through its pedagogy. This study will explore The Universal Declaration of Human Rights using The NewGenPeacebuilder experience and IB pedagogy with the goal to bring together diverse student populations by creating empathy through human commonality. Incorporating icebreaker activities from NewGen and IB will create opportunities for self-reflection, open and safe dialogue, and an introduction to the IB learner profile traits. Students will be able to build a rapport with their fellow classmates through empathy building activities. Using the NewGen and IB will serve as a vehicle through which students gain insight into their lives, the lives of others around the world, and finally their fellow classmates. Discovering this fellowship and creating empathy will help foster an inquiry driven global worldview with our students for the upcoming school year.

Research

Action research has shown that introducing empathy to culturally diverse student populations can result in more positive interactions and support among peers in the classroom. Further studies have shown empathy in young people results in better classroom engagement, higher academic achievement, better communication skills, a lower likelihood of bullying, less aggressive behaviors and emotional disorders, and more positive relationships. Providing opportunities for exposure to different cultural practices, upbringings, and ideas lead to self-reflective growth. By using these practices, we can then create a deeper level of conversation and acceptance. NewGenPeacebuilder's have described the benefits of using your heart to lead including physical health (lower blood pressure), brain function, lower anxiety, and general positive vibes that are often passed on. Training the brain to not have snap negative reactions of others and be in control of their emotions can lead to further personal growth. Using empathy walks, active listening, and action can move students towards the highest level of feeling in the form of agape love. Finally, research cites that after acceptance and tolerance happens more meaningful cultural dialogue must be exercised to create deeper lasting understanding. When students can validate their own background and experiences to the discussion, they take a more active role in the class. Through exposure, self-reflection, and dialogue students can create a deeper connection to their peers within any classroom setting.

As a final activity, students will take their newly gained knowledge of themselves and their peers by applying it to the rest of the world through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. By using this lens students will look at many global issues they take for granted along with others they have never experienced. These discussions will be an excellent way to lead them into their first year of Individuals & Societies class this year.

The Raft

1



This intro activity challenges what students know about their own upbringing and their perceptions of the outside world. Every walk of life is presented in this scenario and students must discuss their thoughts and feelings to decide which six survivors will make it onto the raft to preserve humanity.

Self-Reflection

2



In the next lesson, students will begin self discovery by completing personal values, empathy, and self-care assessments. This introspection will allow students to see what they care about, who they see themselves as, and what things they can work on to improve their well-being.

Where Do You Stand?

5



In our next activity students will be introduced to the IB learner profile traits. As they walk through the room they will see what other values they connect with their peers on along with their weaknesses. We will discuss how these traits can lead to conflict, cohesion, and creating a classroom atmosphere of respect for each other.



Empathy Walk

4



Our next activity is from Amnesty International's "Look Beyond Borders". This four minute experiment simply asks students to sit across from one of their new peers and have four minutes of eye contact. They may make observations and ask questions but keeping constant eye contact with their classmate will make a larger impact than any other activity they complete during this unit.

Look Beyond

3

References

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