Why Diversity Matters: The Importance of Introducing Diversity into Monocultural Schools

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While the United States of America is rapidly growing to be one of the most diverse countries in the world, the racial diversity in schools is still catching up. Many public schools are growing in diversity, but there are still numerous schools that lack diversity. In monocultural schools, schools with students mostly from one racial background, there is a lack of exposure to different ethnicities and cultures. If children are to be able to live in our diverse society, they need to be exposed first in the classroom. Having a diverse classroom environment can help students navigate adulthood, improve knowledge, promote tolerance, and learn both cognitive and social skills. There is an abundance of research and testimonials that show the impact multicultural teaching can have in monocultural schools.

By exposing students to a diverse range of cultures and ethnicity schools are preparing students to grow in citizenship. In 2016, roughly 61% of the United States population was non-Hispanic whites. It is even predicted that by 2060, only 44% of the population will be non-Hispanic whites, the rest being minority ethnicities (Duffin, 2020). The classroom environment should reflect the diversity of the country. Diversity enables students to engage in civil discourse, discussing political issues with a wide range of perspectives. Because there is a lack of varying ethnicities in monocultural schools, it is important for schools to stress the importance that diversity has not only in education, but in society. Learning about different cultures gives students the mindfulness and tolerance needed to play an active role in politics and the community. The United States and its industries operate on an international scale. Students need to be able to work and interact with different cultures and social groups. In a study comparing students in a culturally diverse program and students in a control group at the University of Michigan, the students in the diverse program overall had a better understanding of the roles of
different cultures in society, enjoyed and thought deeper about their experiences in different ethnic groups, and had an increased interest in politics (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004). If introducing a diverse program to students in college can have this much of an impact, imagine the benefits of introducing more diversity centered learning can have in students of all ages, especially students who are relatively unfamiliar with other cultures.

Diverse school programs can also prepare students with important life skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. As previously mentioned, the United States is a very culturally diverse nation. It is important for people to be able to effectively and confidently interact with people from different ethnic groups. However, for students in monocultural school, the diverse classroom environment is missing, therefore from an early age they are missing out on a pivotal opportunity for exposure to others different from themselves. Schools can combat this by implementing lessons about different cultures into the classrooms or by working with other schools to bring students together so that they can interact and learn from each other. This allows for students to develop confidence in themselves to be comfortable around people of different races and ethnic groups. This is very important, as we live in a world where racial issues are prevalent. In a study from the Pew Research Center, 44% of African Americans fear for their personal safety due to their race, and 45% of white people have had someone assume that they were racist or prejudice due to their race (Horowitz, Brown, & Cox, 2019). These are just some of the issues caused by an uncomfortableness around other races, and while this is not the main topic of this paper, this is just one of the things that can be improved upon by introducing diversity into non-diverse classrooms.

Students can learn a great deal from the practices and beliefs of other cultures, fostering creativity. In more diverse schools, students have the opportunity to learn about different cultures
through other classmates. However, in a monocultural school, the variety of different cultures available to students in greatly reduced. Despite this, it is very easy to interweave different cultures into the classroom. Whether it is listening to music from other cultures, creating arts and crafts, or having culture weeks, schools can cultivate the value of diversity in students while still keeping it interesting. Creativity leads to flourishing in other skills as well, such as resourcefulness, determination, and practicality. Janet Tubbs, a speaker at the Meeting of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education, said that stifling creativity and other people’s views “sets the stage for manipulation and development of people who are unable to imaging the outcome of events, who have relinquished their will and who have lost touch with their childlike qualities and Joy of living” (Tubbs, 1992). Creativity does not just translate artistically, but also practically. Students who are creative are better at problem-solving and coming up with new perspectives. The diverse lessons that students learn in the classroom will also carry home with them. Maybe they will try making a new dish that they learned about in France or design an outfit similar to the clothing worn in Ghana or teach their friends a dance they learned from China. All of these new and developing ideas will benefit the student throughout their life, so it is crucial that schools teach about the ways of life around the world, especially monocultural schools.

The best thing about diversity is that it introduces a world beyond what a person is used to. However, not everything in the world is sunshine and rainbows. In every race or culture, there are struggles and negative experiences that define part of their history. By teaching monocultural students more about the history of different cultures, they can develop empathy for others. Empathy is a vital skill to have in life, as it allows people to further understand the struggles and challenges that other people face. This is especially prevalent in today’s society, where even in
the United States various racial groups face constant issues and discrimination. Learning about empathy is even more crucial in a monocultural school, as it brings awareness to the importance of diversity in what can seem like a small world of their own. Monocultural schools can lack perspectives different from their own, so by talking about and stressing varying perspectives it enables students to better empathize with people different from themselves. This newfound empathy also leads to students developing more tolerance. For students in monocultural schools, it might be more difficult to open up to and embrace new cultures, as it can be scary bringing yourself into unfamiliar territory. Once a student gains empathy from learning about diversity, it is easier to embrace new cultures, which leads to a new mindfulness and tolerance. These skills can easily be cultivated by having conversations and discussions about different cultures and what seems good and unfamiliar about them. Finally, because the students are learning to be more empathetic to others, they could start to feel more as a group within the class. Some students may have an exciting culture that they want to share, but don’t feel welcomed or comfortable enough to share. As well, some people may thing diversity focuses on different skin colors rather than different ethnic backgrounds, and think they are not special enough to share. By stressing that diversity welcomes everyone, schools can start to break down these walls and focus on the school as a community.

Finally, the education system, as mentioned previously, prepares people to go out into the world. More specifically, it focuses on preparing students to enter into the workforce. And to become well rounded adults. To do this, schools work towards improving student achievement. Diversity not only benefits a student’s future and personality but can also help to improve student achievement. Overall, students who come from diverse schools are stronger academically. According to The Century Foundation, students in integrated, diverse schools were
more likely to enroll in college, less likely to drop out, and more likely to develop problem-solving, critical thinking, and deeper learning skills (Burris, et al., 2020). While monocultural schools are not the same as integrated schools, the same principles can still be put into effect. Diverse lessons allow for students to learn about new cultures, history, policies, and beliefs that other students from less diverse schools do not have access to. Teaching diverse lessons also allows teachers to have more room to experiment with different learning styles to find what best suits the students. As a school, it is a priority to do what is best for the students, and based on the findings above, introducing diverse lessons into the classroom can only help to students achieve even more.

Introducing diversity into monocultural schools does not have to be difficult. In reality, it can be simple, practical, and cost-efficient. There are various ways to talk more about diversity, such as cultural days, videos, or even parents coming in and talking about their heritage. All of these examples cost little to nothing, and still provide students with a rich learning experience. Change begins in the classroom. One teacher at a time, we can help to transform monocultural schools into flourishing environments of knowledge, acceptance, and love.
References


