

DEI ASSIGNMENTS FOR SPRING 2021 TEACHER CANDIDATES

Nicole Babalola
Curriculum & Teaching

Background

Curriculum & Teaching 494 & 490 - Internship is a 6-7 credit, supervised internship course that follows future teachers' completion of all other practicum experiences on their way to gaining licensure. In this course, students completely take over the role of classroom teachers in their K-12 system placement. Upon completion, students are eligible for initial teacher licensure in the State of Kansas. The course is generally offered in the spring semester but is occasionally offered in other semesters for off-cycle students. Course enrollment is typically around 100 students during the spring semester.

Issues to Address

Because C&T 494 is scheduled in the last semester before graduation, the course is the final opportunity for students to display the application of what they have learned before entering the field of education as a professional teacher. While students know that they will be teaching in increasingly diverse schools, their ability to articulate their understandings of diversity, equity and inclusion need attention.

The goals of this project are to get students thinking about how best to work in different settings with diverse learners, and how to be advocates for those students who may not have a voice. These concepts can then be demonstrated to future employers by students adding a DEI statement to their resumes.

Implementation

Changing existing assignments - Journal topics and questions

- How will you make connections with students and their families?
- What will you change about practices to be more equitable?
- How will you be flexible and supportive with different abilities of your students?

New assignment - Creation of diversity statements

- Added my own diversity statement to the course syllabus as a model
- Students researched diversity issues and programs in current student teacher placement
- Students searched for diversity statements and initiatives in prospective districts
- Students learned how to connect their diversity statements to those in future schools and districts to be employed in

Student learning

A major component of the course change was to have students create and integrate DEI statements into their resumes. Below are some successful examples of students in the course looking forward to their future teaching positions and how they consider DEI issues in those contexts.

First, two excerpts from resume diversity statements are below:

"I will be teaching young adults to love and have compassion for others while learning about the German culture and language. Before learning can happen, everyone needs to feel safe. How can we learn German if we don't use it? We can't use the language until we feel safe to make mistakes. I want each of my students to know they have value and that they bring an important perspective to the class. When I make mistakes, I want students to feel comfortable enough to correct me. We are all learning together; they are learning German, and I am learning how to support their needs. Learning happens when mistakes are made. One mistake I'm nervous to make is accidentally mispronouncing a name. On the first day of school I will have students introduce themselves, so I can hear how their name is pronounced. I also plan to use plenty of representation of people that belong to the German culture. One thing that being a mom has taught me is that honesty is always best. I plan to be honest with students about how I make mistakes and how I'm still learning."

"What diversity, equity, and inclusion means to me is that everyone's differences are celebrated, learned from, respected, and included in the best ways possible in the classroom. This also looks like a supportive teacher who believes that all children can be successful despite race, background, religion, or abilities. You as their teacher help to set them up for success in life and education by giving them tools to succeed. What this looks like to me is giving students ample opportunity to learn about things that maybe aren't a part of their norm, such as learning about different cultures that are represented in our classroom and ones that aren't. I want to help students achieve success in the classroom and in everyday life by providing access and resources if they don't have what they need to be successful. I also strive to be welcoming to everyone in the classroom and teach others how to respect one another's differences and spread love in the classroom. This is something I know I can bring to the classroom to have an open and safe environment. Being an early hire in Blue Valley School District is something I'm striving for. I know I will more than likely be the only black teacher at the school I sign my contract at, in an area where there aren't typically large numbers of black students. I hope to bring a new perspective to the white students who haven't had a black teacher before and a sense of comfort and be a role model to those black students who have probably never had a teacher who looked like them. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are things I will prioritize in every classroom whether through teaching or classroom environment."



Another student created a YouTube video discussing their future DEI classroom practices as part of a journal exercise. You can watch the video at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oa3_v5cqO8Q

Reflections

This course change for the spring really made me think hard about what I am modeling to my students. I want all of my teacher candidates to leave the School of Education and Human Sciences with the tools to self-reflect on their views and how those views will need to include everyone in the school environment, as well as the community. I provided my own Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement at the beginning of my syllabus and explained to the students how I want to treat others. I made sure to make myself available to all students who wanted to take advantage of meeting with me on video, through texting, and email. By doing this, teacher candidates should see that you have to make yourself available to all students and provide different avenues to do so. It is good to see that teacher candidates are aware of their own biases and that they are planning to make sure to include all students, regardless of background in the learning process once they are out teaching. That was my goal, and I hope to improve it by providing examples and scenarios for teacher candidates to critique on ways to help students feel included. This will take some time to implement, but it will be beneficial because teacher candidates can then see real life issues and how to handle them if they are in that same predicament.