

Stacey Morris

Celebrating Cultural Diversity Workshop

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Countering Prejudices

Gloria Steinem said, “The problem for us is not only to learn, but also to unlearn.” This is an interesting concept to me as I am studying to be a high school teacher. After attending the Cultural Diversity Workshop, I realize that being a teacher does not just entail teaching my subject matter; I also have to help my students respect and appreciate each others’ differences. I learned a lot during the workshop, but the lessons that had the biggest impact on me were about recordings, countering internalized oppression, and stopping racial comments while maintaining relationships.

The speakers during the workshop had an interesting and new take for me in understanding and dealing with prejudices. They taught that we are all born innocent. As we grow older, we are told misinformation about other groups; when we take in these fallacies, they become like recordings in our mind. These recordings are created by stereotypes that people around us project and even bad experiences that we generalize and apply to the majority.

We truly believe these “recordings” about other people and they determine how we think and act towards others. People usually are not bad in and of themselves, but their recordings are bad. The good news is that these recordings can be overridden by correct information. Part of being a teacher is trying to convey the correct information and begin the process of re-recording.

I also learned that people sometimes have bad recordings about themselves and the groups to which they belong. This is called internalized oppression. When this exists, the person projects those negative views towards others like them. I believe that this can possibly be how some bullies are created. They feel bad about themselves so they reflect and take out those bad feelings on others. As a teacher, I can combat this by pointing out the good qualities in each of my students. If I highlight the positive aspects about their talents, individualities, and cultures, hopefully my students will feel good about themselves. If my students are able to respect and like themselves, it will be easier for them to respect and like others.

The last important lesson that I want to hit upon is how to stop racial and prejudicial comments and jokes in my classroom. The speakers wanted to teach us a way to stop the comments while still maintaining a good relationship with the person who made the comment. One important thing to keep in mind when you hear an inappropriate comment, is that it probably came from a recording that the person has.

You should listen to the person all the way through to allow them to vent, and then gently come back to the offensive remark. A way to come back to it is to ask open ended questions to understand where the remark came from and how the person views the subject. This will also give you the opportunity to find out about the recordings that the person holds. All of this is best done in private and in a non-judgmental way. You will only succeed in pushing away and making the person defensive if you come on too harsh and strong. This was not mentioned in the workshop but I believe that a good way to contain prejudicial remarks in my classroom is to let my expectations known in the beginning of the year concerning inappropriate comments.

It is important to me to have an open and inviting classroom. We all come with recordings, and it is extremely important for me to erase my recordings and realize the truth about groups of people so I can be an example to my students. Above all, I want to maintain a level of respect in my classroom. The workshop has been very beneficial to me, especially in helping understanding prejudices better and how to counter them.