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Essay 1

Dream Classroom

My Dream Classroom

To begin, I actually have a great group of students in my seventh and eighth grade classroom. My class is full of 37 students with a variety of learning abilities. Our school is not too culturally diverse but there still have been teachable moments where students are exposed to someone's differences. I think it is important for students to feel a sense of belonging to my classroom, so I try to make them understand that they have a say in what happens in our classroom environment. At the beginning of the year we come up with our set of classroom rules, which generally revolves around respect for one another, responsibility for their work and actions, etc. The students and I talk about what we feel is important for our classroom rules. I write down all of the ideas that the students have and then we discuss what rules would work best for all of us. I do ask them who they think should follow these rules, just the students or everyone in our classroom. I think they find it interesting that the other adults in the classroom have to follow these rules too. I think they feel more respected when rules are being followed by them, but also by the teachers. We also talk about ways to help others when they aren't following the rules and consequences that would be fair for everyone. I think good citizenship is following the rules and having everyone able to help others so the rules can be followed. For example, if a student is being disrespectful to another student, the student who is being disrespected shouldn't lash out at the other person. They could use an "I message" in order to convey their feelings to the other student in a positive way. "I don't like it when you yell for me to move when I am in

your way, it makes me mad when you do this, please say excuse me instead.” I think using these “I messages” enables the student to express their feelings and is informing the disrespectful student of how their actions are affecting others. When it comes to having fair consequences for everyone, it gets a little tricky. I don’t think fair means having the same consequences for everyone no matter what. For example, we are a full inclusion classroom. At one point I had two students with Down syndrome in my class. Their consequences for talking out of turn were a little different for another eighth grader who did the same thing. The student would have consequences but it would have to be explained to that student in a different way, rather than pulling a task card (one form of consequences in our school). I think this is an important beginning- of- the- year task because it sets the tone that the students’ ideas are just as important as the teachers. There are other ways in which I would love to incorporate citizenship in my classroom. I would like to have a classroom of respect, compassion and responsibility. I think these are the most important types of citizenship that I would like to teach my students.

My first idea that I think would make for a perfect classroom that harnesses citizenship is to have a way for all students to feel accepted. I want a classroom where students can state their opinion without feeling insecure or feeling that the other students or even their teacher are going to laugh or make fun of their idea. I think having an open environment where students are free to discuss their beliefs will ultimately help the students become better citizen in the classroom and beyond.

I do try my best to make sure all the students feel accepted by me and the other students.

Looking at the Oxfam Global Citizenship article, it lists a guide for global citizens. I think in order for my students to be global citizens, they first need to have these same qualities on a smaller level; in the classroom.

One of the first attributes I think my classroom should have that is listed in the Oxfam article is that the students “participate in the community at a range of levels, from the local to the global.” I want my students to be able to connect with our small community as a classroom first. I think this is important in order for the students to get to know one another. Having different abilities, beliefs and cultures, it is important for students to get along and respect each other before we move beyond the classroom walls. Since money is no object I think it would be helpful to have people from different cultures come to our school in an informal setting. I think it gets too formal to have an assembly. If the students could actually have students from other countries come and visit our classroom for a few days, I think all of the students will be able to interact with and ask questions of the visitor. It also would work in the opposite way. The visitor would be able to interact with my American students. I found the article speaking the truth when it stated that Global Citizenship is not too difficult for students to understand. I find my students thinking about other cultures every day. Right now in fact, I have several girls who are very interested in the United Kingdom because of the band One Direction. Last year they actually learned about Europe and different cultures in Geography but never really cared about the culture. They were learning about other people but because they were just reading words on a page from a book, they had no connection to these people. Now, because of this band having boys from England and Ireland I hear about these countries a lot! Some of them even have Skype friends from these countries. The girls “know” people now that hail from these countries and they feel connected. They hear the way they talk/sing, they have learned through band websites about the differences and similarities they have with people from a different culture. Now, they can’t get enough information about this culture. They care about people “over there.” I think having the students able to interact with other people from different cultures I think this

would be something else that would benefit my students in learning about citizenship. Having them able to Skype with people from other countries is another way to learn at their own level. I honestly think teaching citizenship about respect of other cultures is one of the most important skills I should teach. It would be nice to be able to have the time to teach my students a sense of citizenship and belonging. Students have the responsibility to learn from other cultures in order to be respectful members of society. Yes, I know math and language arts skills are important too, but having a student learn how to become a worthwhile, contributing member of society is just as important.

My students are at the age where they are beginning to learn about social injustices and are beginning to have opinions on broader topics than they are used to. It would be great to have iPads or some other electronic device where they can do research easily. This would help them have information readily available. I would like to have professional development in order to help me better engage and talk with my students about these social injustices. At the end of my students' eighth grade year I have them choose a topic to research and write an opinion paper on. I basically tell them they can choose any topic from drug and alcohol abuse to abortion. In my ideal classroom I would like to be able to be a better teacher. I want to be able to give them all the information they need to make informative decisions and have all the knowledge they need to write their paper. I would love to have a wealth of knowledge taken from different classes such as this one, professional development workshops, etc. in order to be more helpful to my students. I would like to have access to age appropriate websites that offer information about social topics and I would like to learn how to approach these topics with my students. Now, they basically look up a topic that they mostly already have an opinion on. I doubt that at this age, where they are just learning about these injustices, that their opinion is based on a variety of factors.

On to another topic: environmental citizenship. In regards to environmental citizenship, I agree with many of the articles and the videos that environmental citizenship plays an important role in our students' futures.

Our school is actually situated by protected swamp land. I have never incorporated this into my teaching but I think using this swamp land as a starting point in teaching my students about the importance of protecting and maintaining our environment is important to their future. The Whitchurch and Danesfield video about sustainable resources is a great starting point. I would love to have my students start a garden outside of our classroom. We actually have some land in which this could be possible. I think having the students actually dig in the dirt and see the literal fruit of their labor is a great way to promote citizenship within the classroom. This gardening would promote good citizenship with regards to the students being responsible for the food that is being grown. They would be able to share their produce with the rest of the school during lunch or snack time and this would promote community citizenship. The other students would be relying on my students to properly tend to the garden so my students would be responsible for others, not just for themselves. I think the students would have a sense of pride and accomplishment to share what they have produced.

In all I think promoting respect, compassion in my classroom will enable my students to become productive citizens of society. In the article, "Teaching Good Citizenship's Five Themes" Gary Hopkins says compassion provides an "emotional bond between his or her world." I would want my students to feel compassionate toward other people and cultures. By providing opportunities such as having others visit my classroom or having the opportunity to Skype with someone from a different culture; students will be exposed to something and someone who may be different from them. It would be my responsibility to provide the students

with ways in which everyone is connected as a human being. Also if students show respect to others just in our classroom, and if I show the same respect to my students, everyone will feel a sense of citizenship. They will feel like they are actually people with a voice that is able to be heard.