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Cultural Diversity Analysis of a Hot-Rodder

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3. Pick a lesson plan that you have recently developed. How have you incorporated the cultural backgrounds of your students? Discuss how you would modify that lesson plan to incorporate strategies that meet the learning needs of auditory, visual, and tactile/kinesthetic learners. How could you tie in different intelligences?

When I read this option, I immediately thought of a bunch of the kids that I have had in the auto program. This isn't necessarily a review of a specific lesson plan, but more of an emphasis and awareness of cultural issues that I (hopefully!) took advantage of on a regular basis. I have to admit up front that teaching in an auto program is a lot like having your cake and eating it too...the kids are immersed in the content, and love the delivery methods, so as good as these kids made me look, that is exactly how it worked- they made me look good because I could focus on creative methods with them.

Our cultural sub-populations in the auto program are very blended, because of their common interests, but the cultural elements do come forward during classroom discussions as well as when they bring their own vehicles into the shop. We have a bunch of kids that are self proclaimed "gear heads" and into performance, drag racing, stock car racing, and anything fast. These are typically the middle of the country kids, whose dads grew up with the muscle cars of the sixties. A splinter group is the kids that have been influenced by the Asian performance car industry and the popularity of the "tuner" movement and the "Fast and the Furious" movies. Then, there is the heavy, bass pounding stereo systems, which for my generation has nothing to do with performance, but for these kids is as important as a high compression engine. Performance to some kids is not about fast, but about 4 wheel drive, plenty of mud, and going anywhere they want to in the pasture or on the back roads. Finally, there is still a lot of emphasis on lowering vehicles, hydraulics, and showmanship.

At first glance, one can match up the ethnic sub-populations in my school to each of these variations on what is "cool" in a car. I remember thinking and appreciating each of these flavors of modifications, and feeling pretty lucky that I had a connection with each of these cultural variations because I enjoy and appreciate all of it. So as I would discuss hydraulic systems, I would make sure to emphasize the applications in the aftermarket industries, knowing that my Hispanic kids would perk up. During the suspension unit, I would make sure to talk about the impact of raising the ride height, knowing that my farm kids would relate the unit to their 4 wheel drives.

What I found as I would emphasize specific elements gave me a little hint of guilt for falling into an easy trap. My intent was to highlight specific "cultural" elements to be inclusive of all of my kids, and what they taught me was that there was a cross-cultural appreciation for the entire package. My students across the building are very blended, and appreciate and tolerate each other in a lot of ways better than the adults do. Having such a strong military background, these kids have lived, worked and played together their entire lives, and I realized that I was trying to find specific cultural differences to emphasize for inclusiveness. They were beyond inclusion and were to the point of appreciation for what we would consider "differences." I would discuss the electronics of the heavy-bass music systems, and my African-American kids would tell us why that was important, but then the hot rodders would jump in and

talk about the systems that they had installed. I would demonstrate high performance engine components, and the guys with Hondas would ask where they could get similar components for their cars. Each of these sub-systems may have had a basis in culture at some point, but to hear these kids discuss the advantages and disadvantages of specifics, you could see the lessons that we could teach to the adults in our country!

In many ways, this blending of culture was (and still is) the most natural structure for appreciation and understanding of cultural differences, but is also a system that provides for multiple intelligences and addressing the needs of learning styles. This is again a case of students teaching the teacher! What I learned (and hopefully got better at) was that we often try to build in “programs and lessons” to address issues of cultural diversity, multiple intelligences, learning styles, and brain-based

instruction, and what our students bring to the classroom is a complete package of all of this. I moved from a programming mentality to a process thinking, and allowed the personality, learning style, and cultural background of my collective class drive my methods, instead of trying to artificially interject each of these into a unit.

Finally, I have to give my disclaimer. I was in an ideal situation with natural and meaningful elements. While I have always had some females in my courses, the auto program is predominately male. It is pretty easy to see what is of new importance to a 15 or 16 year-old male- girls and cars! I had the opportunity to take one of the “big-two” and appropriately engage students in a meaningful learning environment every day.

So for the post-script... Now our auto program is being taught by a young lady who is very good at what she does. Not only is she into all of the performance issues that I am (and the kids are) but she is also drawing in larger percentages of females, who appreciate her modeling of technical skill, and have found that it is “cool for a girl to be a gear head.” Not only do we have it easy with cultural differences, learning styles, and multiple intelligences, but now we have an easy button on the desk for gender equity!

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