

Culturally Responsive Teaching - Cheryl Medearis - PD

I guess sometimes I struggle with just the term Indian education. I have tried in several different venues to say let's look at what is culturally responsive teaching regardless of what your culture is. We all have a culture. I think many people don't think they have one. And to help our students at the university understand that and what is culturally responsive teaching. What are the tenets that go with that? How do we be inclusive instead of exclusive? The Wolakota project has been a wonderful resource for me as a department chair of education.

So if I hire adjunct faculty or others I can say here's a resource. It's also a resource that I encourage everybody to use. They do projects from there. It's like well I don't know how to do this. I don't know those stories. And I spend a lot of time mentoring people who come in through the Teach for America program, brilliant minds, wonderful young people who want to make a difference. And sometimes it's us and them on our reservation anyway. So it has been a really great resource for me to use and say okay you don't know that story.

Here's a story that you can show. Here are the questions. I use those and show other people how to, you know, this is how they're modeled so that you can ask good questions and reach the goals that you need. So I in higher ed find it a wonderful resource. I try to support the growth of that. There are many challenges for us as a tribal institution. I was talking to someone today to say we educate non-Indian students but yet we get zero dollars from the state of South Dakota to help in that venture.

We have some of the highest dropout rates on the reservation. We have a lot of people who point to the problems. We don't always have people who can say here's a solution. So again, one size does not fit all but I think the essential understandings, you can go to them and say this might be what I need today. I also try to follow the idea of how people, how we model education in the world of teacher ed will be the way that we model, that our teachers will go out and model for others. And the idea of mentoring is critical.

One of the things I tell new teachers, whether they're going out doing their student teaching, they're new their first year, they're not from here, wherever that might be, and they're in a school to find a mentor. And that's one of the first assignments I give. I want you to go into your school and I want you to find somebody who you could go to and say I'm having a really bad day today or I need some resources here.

And I say that might be the cooks, it might be the janitors, it might be your school secretary, your para who may have been there way longer than you. It might be the grandma or the grandpa who comes in and picks the kojias up at the end of the school

day. But to find that mentor, because I say you went into teaching not for the dollars, you went into teaching because somebody made a difference in your life. You are that difference. And that's a huge challenge. It sounds so easy. And nobody does that and makes that journey alone.

They need strong mentors. I think, again, looking at the way the WoLakota Project is structured, it talks about being a good model, using good and strong mentors, finding those mentors, having those mentors within what you do and the way you work with them is a real key. And the other piece is there are many ways of knowing things. You come to know things in a way different way than I do. But if we share that, we have two ways. We have two paths to get to where we're going. So it is strong in my perspective. It walks the talk.