Two summers ago I was able to attend SPED 446: Multicultural Special Education. Since I was “expected” to take this class as a part of the Project BELL requirements, I have to be honest and say I didn’t expect much. It didn’t sound like a topic I was particularly interested in, especially since my field is Science. How wrong I was!

SPED 446, taught by Thomas Duke, was an incredible, eye-opening experience! Not only did I learn about the diverse cultures around me, I also learned a lot about myself.

One of the many activities we participated in was making a YaYa box. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this term, a YaYa box is basically a way to describe ourselves. It can be any box or container. The outside is to be decorated in a way that shows how others view us or how we want them to view us. The inside contains items that are precious to us and that shape who we are.

When I first got the assignment I thought, “This is so easy!” I grabbed pictures of friends, family, students and pets, and thought, “That’s it. That’s my life.” But then I began to really think about what was important to me. Was it money? Obviously not, since I want to be a teacher. (Smile!) What was important to me? What began as a simple assignment turned into a reflection of my life, my goals, my fears, and so much more.

Each person’s YaYa box was different and unique to their lives. It gave us a glimpse into their personalities, their dreams, their hopes, their failures, and their hearts. It was truly a wonderful experience. One of my male classmates asked, “Why are all the women crying?” He didn’t understand the bonding that we were all going through. Watching each person go up and share about their lives and sharing my own was truly a cathartic experience.

I left that class feeling more aware of the different cultures around me. Whether it be ethnicity, social status, gender, or social preference, this class MADE ME THINK. It made me open up my limited thinking and share in the beautiful worlds around me.

I don’t know if I ever thanked Mr. Duke for his time and energy. If not, thank you Thomas for making my summer one of learning and sharing, hope and love. I truly enjoyed your class and would recommend it to everyone!

Motivation

Remember – Some people are like wheelbarrows – they don’t go anywhere unless pushed. Some are like canoes they need to be paddled. Some are like kites – keep a string on them or they fly away. Some are like kittens – more contented when petted. Others resemble footballs – no way to tell which way they’ll bounce next. Then there are the balloons – full of air, ready to blow up. Some are like neon lights – they flash on and off. Then there are those few who are like good watches, open faced, pure gold, quietly busy, and full of good works.
ITE 564 Reaction
By Chuyang Baideme

The first day of ITE 564 was very impressive. Our teacher, Mrs. Enid McKay, lived in different Micronesian islands for 37 years. She knows so much about the people and the land there. We learned a lot from her on the first day. We learned that there are similarities between the Micronesian islands and the people.

Geographically all the Micronesian islands are above the equator, and most of them are volcanic islands with limited land resources and plenty of marine resources. Though they all have good weather year around, they are all vulnerable to natural disasters.

Historically these islands have gone through times of Spanish people trying to convert them, Germany wanting the islands for commercial purposes, Japanese attempt to “Japanize” them, and American’s attempt to democratize them.

Micronesian people have built a maternal society with a hierarchy system, in which they share land, believe nature and chief/authority can take care of them and have a lot of respect for the old and the authority. Younger people are not supposed to tell the old what to do. They know how to live together and make good use of what they have.

We also learned that there are differences between the Micronesian islands and the people. They are composed of Marshall Islands, Belau Island, Yap islands, FSM Islands -- Kosrae Islands, Pohnpei Islands and Chuuk Islands. Each island has its own language and people in different islands are different. For instance, Marshallese are quiet people and they travel a lot; people from Belau tend to share their culture with other people; Yap islanders are conservative and don’t talk too much, but they think a lot.

From what we have learned on the first day, I realized that in order to work with Micronesian parents, educators need to take efforts in finding ways to communicate with parents, to understand and respect their cultures, and to attend to the special cultural needs of their children. We should not assume what Micronesian parents should do or need to do for their children’s education according to our values. We should not judge their children’s behavior simply from our cultural perspective or from the mainstream cultural perspective. For instance, when a Micronesian student does not give the notice of parent-teacher conference to his/her parents, and when parents do not show up, we can’t assume that parents don’t care or the student doesn’t follow instruction. We need to understand that in Micronesian culture, younger ones never tell older ones what to do. If a student gives a parent a notice to attend the conference, the child would be in a position of telling his parents what to do. This would be against their cultural practice. In such a situation, teachers need to find other ways of contacting the parents. As educators we are to work out ways of communicating with the parents to help the Micronesian students.