

## Statement of Diversity – Timothy Ashe, Jr.

“We need to help students cherish and preserve the ethnic and cultural diversity that nourishes and strengthens this community - and this nation.” (*Cesar Chavez*). This quote by Chavez is something I always look back on when evaluating diversity in the classroom. As someone whose Irish grandparents emigrated to this country around 100 years ago, I saw how my grandparents both strengthened and learned from their new Chicago community, but I also saw how much of a conscious effort they made to get to know their new neighbors and how those experiences made them more open to meeting people from various cultures who looked different from them. They always embraced new ways of living and tried to relate to others (even if they were unique or had little in common with them). Thus, I am reminded of the idea that we must remember that we live in a country of immigrants (the U.S.A.) and we need to welcome and embrace all cultures in our classrooms, just like my grandparents did when they first arrived in the country. As a language and culture teacher and researcher, it is important for me to show my students the significance of learning about others in order to open their minds to new world views and cultures. In fact, I have always prided myself on having a classroom that is a judge-free zone where everyone (regardless of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, etc.) is welcomed with open arms.

To adhere to and guide the idea of a forward-thinking mentality regarding the diversity in my classroom, I always stress inclusion when I teach and mentor my students and/or work with others. For example, I make it a point to implement a vast array of pedagogical strategies to support the diverse learning styles of my learners. I focus on having my students negotiate and make meaning in the classroom by allowing them to work together in a collaborative environment where confidence, motivation, identity building, and consistent encouragement allow the students from different backgrounds to come together (including those from underrepresented or minority factions). I am constantly asking for diverse perspectives and angles from my learners so that we strive to build a unique atmosphere that fosters open dialogue and gives credence to all opinions and comments. For example, in some of my activities, I push my students to investigate and explain indigenous communities in the target culture neighborhoods that we mention or discuss so that they may try to make a connection to other underrepresented communities that they could see in Arizona (where I teach) or in other parts of the USA or the world that they may travel to as students.

As a linguist and scholar who enjoys traveling the world for both work and pleasure, I have a sensitivity and appreciation for diversity since I have gotten to know people and aspects of other cultures that have pushed me outside of my comfort zone. Pursuing my dream to become a global citizen and teaching people who look different than me has pushed me to continue my knowledge quest and continues to motivate me to this day. In fact, almost 15 years ago, I left the USA as a college undergraduate and have lived in several countries in Europe, Africa, and South America. I lived in a small farm town in Spain, got to know locals in Tunisia and Morocco, and taught in underprivileged neighborhoods of Sao Paulo, Brazil. During that time, I often reflected on my experiences and thought about what I saw growing up with my grandparents (which initially led to my own prejudices and inaccurate characterizations of people from different countries) but realized that learning about others and exploring other languages and cultures of the world allows one to better understand themselves. One example of how I integrate my

commitment to diversity into my role as a socially responsible educator is to think about how social media, blogging, journaling, sports, music, and the arts can be used to connect people so that they can have more opportunities in the classroom and in their communities to develop meaningful relationships with others. After all, my mission with everything I do as an educator is connected to giving a number of different opportunities to my students in the classroom in order for them to see the world from a more global perspective and eventually grow as a learner and world citizen.

My vision for teaching, learning, and diversity can best be summed up by what Brazilian thinker and writer, Paulo Coelho, said, which was, “culture makes people understand each other better. And if they understand each other better in their soul, it is easier to overcome the economic and political barriers. But first they have to understand that their neighbor is, in the end, just like them, with the same problems, the same questions.”