Building Classroom Community

Quilt: Focus on Race, Identity, and Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices.

[Sketch with grid and notes]

[Image of a colorful quilt]

[Image of an office wall with quilts]

[Image of a classroom with quilts on display]
When I first learned about this assignment, my mind immediately went to quilting. Quilting has been a way for me to relieve stress and create something throughout the COVID pandemic and way too much time locked inside. While I already had this format in mind going into this project, I didn’t quite realize the impact it would have on me. I thought this would just be like any other quilt and actually easier because it’s smaller than a full-size quilt. However, throughout the process I found the meditative cutting, sewing, and quilting to be an incredible space for reflection on my student teaching and time for planning for my future classroom. I had to think of how to represent what makes a successful classroom community in a quilt format, and how all the moving parts would fit together and be seen on the quilt itself. Additionally, this was an incredibly collaborative process with my family and friends weighing in and helping me throughout the process (shout out to my mom).

Because the quilt is so symbolic, a diagram is attached to show the thoughtfulness and purpose behind this quilt. The squares are all units or topics that I taught or want to teach in the future (future topics are pinned with a safety pin – literally putting a pin in it). I intentionally wanted the quilt’s center to be in the margins of what represents the curriculum, because to me, the curriculum shouldn’t be the center of the classroom but instead the teaching practices such as Culturally Responsive Teaching should be the center of the classroom even if it isn’t explicitly visible. As such, the seams that stitch all the squares of curriculum and content together are Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices. Horizontal seams are practices that I have done, and vertical are practices that I hope to enact in the future. After piecing the quilt together, I had to think about the quilting itself. Driving 5 hours to borrow my mom’s quilting machine, I alternated between using a stencil and freehand quilting to represent my students. The alternate quilting shows the diversity of students as well as how students may show up in the class – sometimes the rules and procedures work just fine and other times there’s some improv that’s needed to best help students succeed in the classroom. There are some clear mistakes in the quilting, and rather than taking out the stitching and trying again, I decided to keep the mistakes in the quilting to show that I will be making mistakes in my first year (I’m not perfect!) and that I can learn from those mistakes and move forward. And, even with mistakes such as teaching curriculum poorly or missing a topic or not being able to reach a student, those mistakes can be caught through the development of a strong and robust classroom community to create a whole that is more than the sum of its parts and a beautiful product where the mistakes are less noticeable. Finally, I attached the binding for the quilt and saw the binding as my role as a teacher; to hold together the edges and structure of the quilt but not be the center of attention. Just a guide and model to help shape the quilt and classroom community. I had to reflect on my role as a white female teacher and how this identity could cause difficulties in creating classroom community, and I came to the realization that I have to continue to acknowledge and unlearn my own biases in order to create a classroom community that is welcoming and open to all students.