

## **A challenging experience in my professional career**

**Maifer Demirbec, PH.D.**

*Adjunct Assistant Professor Math. Department LaGuardia Community College, New York*

As a new immigrant in NY City, I was happy to find a job, even though part-time at College, to teach Pre Algebra for students who need remedial basic skills and Medical Dosage Calculation. It was my wish to continue to work as teacher because I think I have experience and qualifications in this field (I used to work as a teacher in my native, in both levels: secondary and university). I am familiar to work with diverse native speakers' languages but in my very beginning activity as a teacher in NY City I faced problems with some students referring my native accent. Fortunately, Math has the same theory, exercises and practices all around the world.

It appears that complex factors contribute to students' perceptions of disciplines taught by an accented speaker. Some psychologists found that it may be possible that the dissimilarity between students and instructors regarding ethnicity, country of origin, and first language can prompt negative emotions such as "anxiety and uncertainty" (Gudykunst, 1988). Consequently, it may influence students' evaluation of instruction by biasing their perceptions of teachers' effectiveness and affecting scoring of international instructors.

Being aware of all of these possible negative consequences, I applied the following strategy – I displayed clearly diagrams on the walls referring every new Math concepts with the new vocabulary word of each lesson, given to students the opportunity to both hear, and see all the new concepts of the lesson. I enforced the lesson with hand crafts card that contain on one side the new concept and in other side a short definition of it. I continued with practicing on the board with examples- real word problems- for each new concept.

I continued to inform them about the culture and worldview of the other. I used for this an appropriate communication, using a sensitive, nonjudgmental manner; I asked them to express their worldviews, opinions, and expectations in classroom discussions. Simultaneously, I prompted in my students an interest in "different" people, encouraging them to adopt the idea of becoming a global citizen giving examples of how people in other areas of the world might different ways of solving the same problem. I was proud to show to them an article from "New York Times" in witch was stated that the first International Olympiad of Math had been taken place in my native country (Romania) in 1959.

In addition, when I spot resistance from one person or a small group of freshmen to whom my accent may too fanny, I act immediately and try to keep those students busy and engaged. I make sure that I add several inclusive pronouns, such as "we", "our class", "I", and "us", and "our objectives", when I talked to the class. I gave to them the time manager job of their classmates' semester projects, because "I am too busy" grading and speech evaluation for every speaker. They take the task seriously and did a good job. By delegating power for a small amount of time and for a specific task my formerly disruptive students became engaged and responsible for the rest of the time. Moreover, in the end of summer semester, they came to thank me for passing the compass test, all the class.

I had also some students that become bored following strictly the syllabus just because their level of mathematics were above requirements of the lesson; for example, on applications of geometry with the topic of finding the area and perimeter of any polygon, for those advanced students I differentiated the requirements; I told them a story of a king will was that to share his kingdom in five equal areal parts for his five sons. The king wanted each son to have same shape of kingdom, knowing that the original shape of the whole fortune was in shape of letter "L". My question was if they can help the king to solve the situation?

Likewise, student math activity outside of the usual syllabus is a strategy that I encouraged and some of students expected, for example from undergraduate research projects. I remain optimistic that my students at all levels will continue to be enthusiastic in learning Math, eagerly expecting the challenges for future lessons.

Throughout above mentioned experience, I highlighted the importance of flexibility, control, adaptability, intercultural communication competence, that the teacher needs to have in the classroom. I also

believe that using more Math applied in word problems, in classroom, in seminars in the books, in the articles we write, will train our students to be better problem-solvers that we are.