

Personal Reflection on a Culturally Sensitive Subject

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Personal Reflection on Bullying and Body Shaming

Remembering

One year, there was an incident where a fight broke out in my classroom between two 11th grade boys. It was unique in that no students joined the fight to support either party. I responded by de-escalating the fight and making one of the two students leave the room while I got help to come. I talked to both students to try to learn why the fight occurred, and I learned that the smaller of the two boys took a picture of the bigger boy in the shower. He then shared the picture around the school thoroughly fat-shaming the bigger boy. Of course, body-shaming is a culturally sensitive topic and is not acceptable in my class, so this issue demanded further attention.

The bigger boy apologized for treating my class with disrespect and explained that the smaller boy said something to taunting him about the situation and "he just couldn't hold his anger in anymore". Of course, the administrators took care of the issue past this point and removed the boys from my classroom for the day, but I dedicated the remainder of my class to explain that treating people with respect and dignity matters. To stay on the topic of science, I briefly taught a lesson on the physiological effects of stress on the body, specifically how social interactions can cause lasting damage. There were some further instances of bullying in my classroom as time went on, but the students seemed more receptive to communicating about arising problems and being cooperative with each other when they were in my classroom.

The bigger boy did come back and talk to me about how to act in the future after experiencing something like this. I'd like to think I helped him, but there is often no way to know once a student graduates. However, I do think the resulting discussions with this boy helped shape my teaching philosophy regarding the environment of my classroom.

Understanding, Applying, and Analyzing

The most important thing I did was treat both boys with dignity by asking them privately what incited the fight. I also think that the classroom environment must have been one where the students trusted me to be fair and understanding if they told me the truth. I strive to always take the time to be kind to my students and truly listen to them when they speak to me treating them first as humans and second as students. Hopefully, there is some trust and rapport established in each class I teach. Establishing and maintaining a "pattern" of a welcoming and inclusive environment is foundational for creating a safe space for issues to arise and then be dealt with responsibly.

Evaluating and Creating

I think I did well in addressing this situation emotionally through supporting the two boys through following discussions and continued focus on the classroom environment. However, if I could change something it would be to not step into the fight to physically break them up. It was an inexperienced teacher's instinct to stop the violence in my class, but I should have waited for the administrators to come to help. I should remember this situation and continue prioritizing an inclusive classroom culture. It is often easier to prioritize the logistical duties of teaching but this cautionary memory reminds me that supporting my students holistically is worthy of my energy and focused attention.

I do think I will use Bloom's taxonomy as a model for my future reflections as it is helpful to not only assess the situation but also to apply these experiences to future experiences.