

How to Respond to Sensitive Issues in the Classroom: A Choose your own Equitable Adventure

CLASS, what has been the most difficult issue you have dealt with this year?

[Graphic image description: Feminine-presenting white teacher.]

Choose your adventure by following the teacher responses below:

Being Black.

[Graphic image description: Masculine-presenting Black student.]

1
 "I don't think we can get into that."

2
 "Thank you for sharing, but let's table this response for later, if we have time."

3
 "Thank you for sharing. Let's explore this very real issue further, if you'd like."

1
 "I don't think we can get into that."

Intent

- Focus class discussion on a different topic
- Hidden curriculum at the forefront of exclusion/fear
- Deficit thinking/perspective

Impact

- Students' voice doesn't matter
- Racial issues aren't important
- Students' disengage in discussion
- Students' stop coming to class
- Reinforce harmful stereotypes

Critical Reflection toward Becoming an Anti-Oppressive Educator

- In what ways do teachers, especially white teachers, hold privilege in relation to instructional activities and goals?
- How can teachers acknowledge and share their privilege to bring in and meet the specific needs of students with cultural backgrounds different from theirs?

Intent

- Avoidance
- Neutrality
- Fragility
- Politeness
- Color Neutrality

Impact

- Obscures or rationalizes inequities
- Preserves and legitimizes status quo of what's "normal"
- Guarding your own interest against others
- Race doesn't matter and is nonexistent
- Inequitable outcomes for students of Color

"Thank you for sharing. Let's explore this very real issue further, if you'd like."

3

Intent

- Provide a safe space for students to raise issues
- Acknowledge students' histories
- Promote and model educational equity

Impact

- Anti-oppressive education
- Students Feel Valued
- Students are more engaged in School
- More equitable outcome

Action Steps to be an Anti-Oppressive Educator

- Identify racist [ableist, sexist, classist, heterosexist] acts, policies or stated ideas.
- Consider ways in which race and racism are influenced by other factors such as class, gender, disability, religion, national origin, and sexuality.
- Point out how whiteness and or other dominant identities are centered and positioned as superior
- Engage in action, policy, practice, resource or language that dismantles the production of a racial hierarchy or hierarchies along identity markers, and promote educational equity.

Critical Reflection toward Becoming an Anti-Oppressive Educator

How did this teacher miss an opportunity to attend to specific needs of a student with a different cultural background?

"Thank you for sharing, but let's table this response for later, if we have time."

2

Meet the Authors

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