

Take Me Out Of The Box: Revealing Stereotypes

Summary

This activity provides students an opportunity to explore stereotypes, acknowledge their dangers and help break through these rigid ways of viewing people--all in an effort to create a safer and more caring community.

Time Frame

2 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Large Groups

Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning, Communication, Social & Civic Responsibility, Employability

Materials

- 3 differently colored 1"x 8" strips of paper for each student
- 1 box (the size of a paper box or larger)
- 1 sheet of butcher paper per class, long enough to cover 3 sides of the box
- 3 markers of different colors
- 3 pre-determined "target groups" for each class to examine (see examples in attachments)
- sheets of first draft and final draft paper for each student
- markers, crayons, colored pencils
- a price tag (approximately 2"x4") for each target group discussed in class (can be made from manilla folders or brightly colored paper)

Background for Teachers

Developing a school culture which values diversity is important for ensuring healthy relationships and an environment conducive to learning. Education programs that are based on the assumption that the cultural practices of the dominant group in society are the best and only way to operate have the effect of marginalizing students from minority groups and of diminishing their participation in, and outcomes from, schooling.

Student Prior Knowledge

Use of adjectives and descriptive phrases.
A sense of safety and respect within the classroom.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to define the term "stereotype", explain how stereotypes can detract from a safe and caring community and disprove at least one stereotype.

Instructional Procedures

DAY 1:

Describing the Group

Begin by reviewing the use of adjectives and descriptive phrases. Ask students to come up with adjectives and/or descriptive phrases which characterize "teachers". Record 10-15 responses on the

board. It is important for students to feel like they are able to answer freely. This means answers like "boring" and "mean" are just as valid as "intelligent" and "helpful".

Distribute 3 differently colored strips of paper to each student. Inform students that this activity will be done anonymously and that they should not write their names on the strips of papers.

Show or write the name of the first target group; e.g., old people, Latinos/Hispanics, athletes, etc. (see "List of Target Groups"). Ask students to silently think of an adjective or descriptive phrase for this group of people and write it on the blue strip of paper.

Rating the Group

Next, instruct students to think about how much they would want to be a member of that group or, if they belong to that group, how much they like being a member of that group. Have students rate membership desirability by choosing one of the ratings listed below and writing it next to their adjective on the blue strip of paper:

1 = No way! Or, I dislike being in this group.

2 = I could deal with it somehow. Or, I don't really like it but I put up with it.

3 = Sounds good. Or, It's okay being in this group.

4 = Sign me up! Or, I really like being in this group.

Ask students to fold their blue strip in half and put it to the side. Repeat this process for the other two target groups. When finished, have three students collect the strips, each one picking up a specific color. Next, have the students shuffle the folded strips and redistribute one of each color to every class member. Students will be anxious to read what is on their strips. Instruct them not to say anything as they read their new strips, especially, "I got my own".

Creating the Box

Turn the box--wrapped with butcher paper--so the opening is pointing downward. Write the first target group's name at the top of one side of the box. Ask students to look at what is written on their blue strip of paper. One by one have students read the adjective or descriptive phrase out loud while the words are recorded on the box. Remind students that their job is to communicate what someone else has written, not to agree or disagree with the adjective/descriptive phrase. After all the descriptions have been recorded, write the numbers 1 through 4 on the same side of the box. Next, ask students to look at the rating on the blue paper and raise their hand when the number written on their strip is said aloud. As students raise their hands, record the number of responses for each rating on the box. Repeat this process for the other two sides of the box, changing the color of marker for each side.

Revealing the Stereotypes

By now students can see that their classmates have a variety of ideas and opinions about each of the target groups. Show/write the word "stereotype". Define stereotype as a fixed idea or opinion about a person or group of people. Provide an example such as, "All smart students are goody goodies/nerds".

FYI: The term "stereotype" comes from the early days of printing. A metal plate was used to turn out sheet after sheet of paper. Each sheet, of course, looked just like the others. The plate was called a "stereotype".

Breaking Through The Stereotypes

Ask for a volunteer who has a close friend or family member in the first target group (the student might also be a member of the group) to represent that person. Place the box over the student's head with the first side of adjectives/descriptive phrases visible to the class. Ask the volunteer, "Are you _____?" Fill in the blank with one of the adjectives or descriptive phrases. The volunteer may respond with a variety of answers; e.g., "yes", "no", "maybe", "kind of", "not really" and/or "sometimes". Remind the class that this student is representing someone else as he/she answers the questions. Continue until all the words have been read. Repeat this process for the other two sides of the box, inviting a new volunteer to participate each time. This activity will only work if there is a sense of safety and respect in the classroom.

Ask:

1. Did every adjective and description apply to the person inside the box?
2. Do most people have the same stereotypes about specific groups?
3. Do stereotypes tell us anything about the individual inside the box?
4. How do stereotypes affect our behavior toward others?

Remind students that it is normal for people to categorize each other. What is dangerous is when we stick someone in a box (stereotype) and don't let them out (believe the stereotype and treat them differently and/or unfairly).

DAY 2:

Adding Up The Value

Hang up the sheets of butcher paper with the adjectives/descriptive phrases from the previous day. Determine the "value" each target group by assigning a monetary figure to each rating:

each 1 = 1 cent

each 2 = 1 dollar

each 3 = 10 dollars

each 4 = 20 dollars

Find the total dollar amount for each group. Write each value on a price tag and attach the tags to the butcher paper next to their corresponding group name.

Ask students to identify the target groups that are made fun of or looked down on the most. List the mentioned groups on the board. Each classroom/school/community will be different, but usually the target groups of "poor people", "overweight people" and "gay men and lesbians" are listed. Next, instruct the students to compare the groups that are listed on the board with their price tag and ask, "Are there any similarities? differences?" Usually the groups that are looked down on have a lower price tag value. Help students understand how much easier it is to destroy something when we don't respect it. Similarly, when we believe stereotypes, we may devalue people which makes it easier to hurt them with words or actions (examples include James Byrd and Matthew Shephard)

Taking People Out Of The Box

Ask, "What can be done to reduce the impact of stereotypes?"

One way to take people out of the box is to get to know them as an individual rather than a label.

Acrostic Poem

Show students an example of an acrostic poem which breaks through one of the stereotypes examined in class(example provided). Ask students to think of someone they know who doesn't fit in one of the stereotype "boxes". Instruct the class to write the person's name, or the target group they belong to, vertically on the paper provided. Instruct students to compose a sentence for each letter in the person's (or group's) name which shows how they break through the stereotype. Refer to the rubric for specific requirements.

Strategies for Diverse Learners

Use pictures to represent the various groups as they are discussed in class.

Simplify the rating procedure by having students draw an arrow up for "thumbs up" to that group; an arrow down for "thumbs down" to that group; a horizontal arrow for somewhere in the middle.

Invite students to draw a picture(s) instead of writing the acrostic poem to break through a stereotype.

Extensions

Have students select and complete one or more of the "101 Ways to Combat Prejudice" from "Close The Book On Hate" brochure.

Create a Collective Poem with sentence starters such as:

"I am..."

"I am from..."

"I want..."

"I wish..."

"I think..."

"I see..."

"I believe..."

"I know..."

"I wonder..."

Read the children's book "If the World Were a Village" by David J. Smith (ISBN 1-55074-779-7) which shrinks the world's population to 100 people and provides a community-based perspective on topics like nationalities, languages, ages, religions, food, schooling, money, etc.

Create a collage by combining the adjective posters, their acrostic poems, written personal experiences, and pictures and artwork that present how assumptions and stereotypes make them feel.

Make an historical timeline showing important events in the histories of traditionally underrepresented groups in Utah.

If students are reading Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, by Mildred D. Taylor, in their Language Arts class, they can look for examples of stereotyping and prejudice in the story.

Assessment Plan

Students will complete an acrostic poem which helps break through one of the stereotypes identified in the class activity.

Rubrics

[Acrostic Poem \(Breaking Through Stereotypes\)](#)

Bibliography

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