Carson Williams

Teaching Tolerance/Social Justice Strategy

**Name of the Article:** What is Empathy?

**Population:** early elementary aged students

**Objective:** Teach students what empathy is, why it is important, and how to use it to better understand and respect their classmates.

**Age/Grade Level:** kindergarten through second grade (k-2)

**Procedure:**

Intro

There are some virtues that children should learn sooner rather than later; one of those is empathy. If the concept of seeing through someone else’s perspective is taught early, it sets the stage for children to develop into conscientious members of society. This lesson is a way for young students to learn the benefits of empathizing with their peers.

Summary

The lesson opens with the objectives of the activities, which are to understand empathy and learn how to use it to be understanding toward others. Next, it lists two essential questions for the children to think about throughout the lesson. One question asks about the meaning of “putting yourself in someone else’s shoes” and the other asks about behaviors that show understanding of other people’s feelings. The lesson then gives the definition of empathy. After the definition, there is an overview. The overview touches on the effect of being sensitive to other people’s experiences in school, which is a more accepting and respectful environment. There are two materials used in this lesson. The first is a sheet of paper showing happy, sad, proud, and angry cartoon faces for the students to cut out called “Feeling Faces.” The second is named “How Would You Feel?” and provides scenarios of children being insensitive, followed by questions that ask the child how they would feel if they were in that scenario. Next, the lesson describes the two activities. The first uses only the “Feeling Faces,” and instructs students to label each face with a feeling. The second uses both materials; the teacher is supposed to read the scenarios aloud as the students choose the cartoon face that shows how they would feel in each situation. The lesson then suggests a class discussion of each situation; the teacher should encourage students to consider how the results might be different if one child put his or herself in the other child’s shoes. Next, the children will partner up and rewrite one of the stories of their choice in a way that shows empathy instead of misunderstanding, then share with the class. Lastly, there is an extension activity. The children will make posters about their chosen story and hang them around the school.

**Possible Adaptations:** The activities in this lesson are perfect for kindergartners, first, and second graders. Although, it could also be used for older students who have difficulty maintaining friendships or seeing outside their own perspective. It could possibly help people who have specific emotional disabilities. The scenarios could be tweaked to represent situations that relate to the individual’s experiences for a more meaningful take away of the lesson.

**Reflection:** Overall, I loved the lesson. I can see the activities being beneficial because in a school setting, children are mostly taught to be concerned with themselves. It is no wonder that many of them miss the mark when it comes to worrying about other people’s feelings. I think if this lesson was taught in every classroom, there could be a decrease in bullying and an increase in friendships that never would have occurred otherwise.

**Reference**

https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/what-is-empathy