Athletics and Multicultural Students
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Introduction

Through participation in athletic activities, student athletes can learn sportsmen-like ideals and can carry these ideals into their personal lives. The purpose of this research project is to focus on how these developments can positively influence students in a middle school, multi-cultural environment.

My motivation for this project comes from many areas. Primarily, my determination was to change the ways my students respect others and me, especially in their conversations. I also had a personal interest in sports which led me to connect this project with a sports theme. The themes of sports and teaching respect tie in with my professional career goal of athletic administrator.

Focus of My Research Project

My questions focused on how specific classroom lesson might help develop an atmosphere of respect in the classroom.

• When teachers demonstrate respect and demand respect from their students, how will the students respond? Does it matter whether an individual is a student athlete or not?
• Will assigning students projects that talks about respect, character, and sportsmanship increase respect in the classroom?
• Can athletes who serve as positive role models assist in developing a sense of respect in middle school students in a multicultural setting?

Background

Sports today are a very important aspect of many people’s lives, even if they are just the weekend athletes. President Clinton in April 1997 hosted a forum on this very topic televised by ESPN. The National Federation of State High School Associations has targeted eight areas in their curriculum on citizenship through sports. These areas are respect, positive values, perspective, sportsmanship, teamwork, healthy lifestyles, community service, and self-evaluation.

These topics are not only of interest to the athletes but to the administrators as well. In many schools, the three R’s (reading, (w)riting, and (a)rithmetic) have been replaced by the three A’s- academics, athletics, and activities. Athletics have become an integral part of the education process. I propose we add two additional R’s; i.e. respect and responsibility. Sports provide an opportunity to develop good citizenship and role models that set good examples. As teachers, let’s steer our children to the positive roles models,
whether they are professional athletes, family members, friends, and yes, even ourselves.

The topic I selected for the lessons I would teach was heroes -- heroes that had dreams and had to overcome life challenges. This topic of heroes and citizenship fits into many subject areas, such as ethics, social studies, theology, history, sports marketing, physical education, health, art, public speaking, philosophy, government, politics, education, and others. The theme crosses genres into drug abuse and alcoholism, race issues, wars, family life, survival, positive mental attitude, dreams and dreaming.

How do we, as teachers, develop citizenship through sports and sport heroes? Many athletes are viewed by young people as heroes. All of these athletes are role models; some are positive role models, some are not. Positive role models are sometimes defined as a hero. Who is a hero? Why are they viewed as a hero? What is a hero? Are heroes good citizens? The main focus for this particular project will concentrate on athletes that were born in a foreign country and then came to America. The books and movies that are listed provide a small sampling of resources. A listing of general books on this topic is also provided.

Method

As part of my project, I decided to implement various classroom projects to help and encourage students to develop sportsmanship. These various documents are included and may be found in the appendix. The listing of class assignments is also provided. A listing of available internet resources follows:

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

- Classroom rule
- Self-esteem video
- Sportsman’s prayer
- Character poem
- Because I am a child of poem
- Children learn what they live poem
- Bill of Rights for Young Athletes’ poem
- Mr. Toner’s power point presentation for this project
- Sportsmanship from A to Z
- Responsibilities of Sportsmanship, A goal for everyone
- Definitions of a good student and a good teacher and the connection with the six P’s (6 characteristics of a good student at Gunston Middle School)
- Class summary

As classroom documentation for this project, I decided to track and chart students based on particular behaviors. I decided to use as a basis the characteristics of a Gunston Middle School Student, i.e., the 6 P’s. (polite, proud, prompt, productive, prepared, and positive). I decided to track just three characteristics: prompt, prepared and polite. The student athletes were the
I decided to track and document my second period class, a group of eighth graders who had seven student athletes out of 25 students in the class. Results are tabulated and reported at the end of this paper.

Findings

Based on the results of this project, participation in interscholastic athletics does not have an influence on the behavior of student athletes. In fact, it seems possible that it has a negative influence on student athletes at the middle school level. The display of sportsmanship of Mark McGuire and Sammy Sosa seems to be unique while the behavior of so many other athletes is unsportsmanlike. There are days when, based on the media reports we hear, positive role models in professional sports seem to becoming fewer and fewer. The media also may share in this responsibility. Our role as teachers is to direct these young minds into the right and proper direction. We share this responsibility with the parents of these children, which is not a small task.

Another part of my class structure is my end of year class summary. Students summarized how they were as students as a follow up of their definitions of a good student written at the beginning of the year. Students also wrote back to me in the end of the class summary the importance of respect and my positive influence in that regard (a teacher evaluation):

1. “Mr. Toner is very patient with us.”
2. “Mr. Toner respects us.”
3. “Mr. Toner is very fair.”
4. “I think that our teacher, Mr. Toner, was always eager to help, which was very useful to some that needed his help. He gave support to his students and was always ready to lend a helping hand.”
5. “Mr. Toner was a very nice teacher who had patience with the class.”
6. “I think that Mr. Toner is a good teacher because he has respect for his students.”
7. “Thank you for being a supportive teacher.”
8. “Mr. Toner is great because he is a nice teacher.”
9. “Mr. Toner has been a really nice teacher because he listens to you and doesn’t make you feel bad.”
10. “A good teacher requires a lot of patience and time, and love for children. Mr. Toner is a great teacher because he has pride in his work and pride for others. Mr. Toner fills my expectations for a good teacher. Mr. Toner you’re great.”
11. “Our teacher, Mr. Toner was fun to work with because he let us do a lot of fun stuff and was nice. He stayed calm whenever anyone made him mad and tried to solve it reasonably. I appreciate everything thoughtful and nice Mr. Toner did for my class and me and I hope he appreciated us too. I enjoyed this class very much and I hope we have another class and teacher just like this one.”
12. “You lived up to our expectations as a good teacher by being a good role model in many ways.”

I share this information as a means of encouraging others to receive feedback from their students as an opportunity for one to improve their teaching. For example, I do not allow students to say “shut-up” to one another and I never say this to my students. I explain to them that I feel this comment is disrespectful and is not tolerated in my classroom. Many students have commented that other teachers have used this phrase. I respond, I can only control what happens in my classroom. I encourage teachers to be careful in the ways they talk to their students and remind all adults we need to model good respectful behavior. I keep these class summaries as a reminder to me of ways for me to improve my teaching.

Reflection

The most valuable lesson I learned was that a clearly defined discipline policy should be in place throughout the school. The school, Gunston Middle School, is only in its sixth year of existence and, because of this, a rewards program, in addition to consequences, needs to be implemented. The school has established a committee that is currently reviewing and updating a more refined policy. I have also reviewed other school wide discipline plans and began work on refining my plan.

Another lesson was the realization that sportsmanship is taught through involvement with sports teams, but also in the student athletes' home environment. The school has a policy of allowing students to participate in athletics even if they are not doing well in some academic subjects.

Available Online Resources

- [http://www.sportsmanship.com](http://www.sportsmanship.com)
- [http://www.ncaa.org/sportsmanship](http://www.ncaa.org/sportsmanship)
- [http://www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org)
- [http://www.charactercounts.com](http://www.charactercounts.com)
- [http://www.internationalsport.com](http://www.internationalsport.com)

Appendices available upon request.