

Self-Reflection: How am I seen in the Classroom?

It is your first day in the classroom, and you walk into the room and begin to set up your teaching materials. Individually, please answer the following questions using this worksheet.

Your responses will help generate a small group discussion.

1. To begin, think about what students will see when you step before them as their instructor. What will they first notice about you? (You might consider characteristics such as age, gender, race, physical presence, intelligence, real world experience, language, religion, sexuality, age, ethnicity, etc.)
2. How do you identify? How does this differ from how your students might perceive you? (Optional: How comfortable are you with these categories?)
3. What are the potential challenges and advantages of these characteristics/assumptions for your teaching and student learning?
4. What type of classroom climate do you desire? Think about the purpose of the class (e.g. lab exercises, discussion, etc...) and the customs of your discipline. How might your identity, and students' perceptions of you, challenge the desired climate? How might your identity, and students' perceptions of you, be used as assets?
5. What other information do you want your students to know? What impressions would you like your students to have?
6. What strategies do you (could you) use to establish your identity and authority in the classroom? How much of your identity do you reveal to your students and why?

Identity and Authority Case Study

Strategies: Facilitating office hours, navigating one-on-one confrontations with students, understanding the relationship between identity (race, gender, age, etc...) and authority), negotiating the teacher-self relationship, defining ethical boundaries, negotiating university teaching cultures and professor expectations

Character Demographics	
Joshua	White male, upperclassmen, early 20s
Angela	Latina female, pre-candidate, mid-20s
Professor X	White male, associate professor, mid-40s

Joshua has been an average student throughout the fall semester. He contributed to classroom discussion sporadically, and earned mostly low B's and low A's. He earned a B (86%) in the course. His GSI, Angela, was surprised when she was informed that Joshua had begun to complain about his final course grade, more than a month after the semester ended. Joshua sent several e-mails to the lead professor arguing that his grade was significantly lower than anticipated, and requested a meeting where he could voice his concerns face-to-face. The professor contacted Angela, who had already begun working with 60 new students in her winter semester class, and asked that she meet with the student. He assured her that unless there was a tabulation error in determining Joshua's grade, he would stand behind Angela's final decision.

Angela told Joshua to come to her winter semester office hours. Since the professor did not allow students to keep their blue books from past exams, Joshua insisted that Angela review each question of the final exam. During this review Angela realized that she had miscalculated his overall exam grade by one percentage point (Joshua had earned a 78% instead of a 77%). Angela re-calculated Joshua's course grade, and showed him that this adjustment did not change his final grade. Unsatisfied, Joshua demanded that Angela review her rationale behind each grade, and prove her objectivity. Angela smiled to herself as she thought about the careful thought Joshua was now expending to argue for a grade change. If only he had put this much effort into studying for exams, she mused. Joshua became unsettled: "What are you laughing at?" he demanded. "I don't see anything funny."

Unsure how to respond, Angela became anxious to end the appointment that had now gone on for more than 45 minutes. She told Joshua that unless he had a specific question that she could answer, they would need to end the appointment. Recognizing the tension in the room, Joshua apologized for his previous comment, and then spent about five minutes explaining that the B he'd earned in this class would ruin his chances of getting into law school. He then complained that the course exams had been unfair, and expressed his disgust for the course overall and the professor that had designed it.

After an hour, Joshua finally left Angela's office. He sent a follow-up e-mail apologizing for his sour mood. Angela's final message to the professor stated that Joshua had been rude in the meeting, and that he had no grounds for a grade change. She did not mention what she considered to be a minor tabulation error. The professor never responded to Angela's e-mail. Joshua's grade remained the same.

Discussion Questions:

What are the underlying issues at work in this scenario?

What is the most desirable outcome of such a situation?

What role did the professor play in this confrontation?

How might this situation have been different if Angela was an older white male?

How might this situation have been different if Joshua was a Latino young woman?

What if the professor had been Latino?

Did Angela address the confrontation effectively?

What could she have done differently that would have resulted in a better outcome?

What could she have done differently that would have resulted in a less favorable outcome?

What should her next steps be?

Could Angela have taken any preventative steps to avoid this confrontation altogether?