Conflict in the Community College Classroom.

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Violence and aggression in the community college classroom is something overlooked by many. “In a given month, 11 percent of all students reported having something stolen, 1.3 percent of all students reported being physically assaulted, and 12 percent of all teachers reported having something stolen, 5 percent of these thefts occurring by way of force, weapons, or threats” (Barton, 1998). At this level of education, it is typically assumed that students will act professionally and know how to control anger and situations of conflict. On the contrary, at this level, students may be under more stress than elementary and/or secondary students. One in four professors witness conflict and/or violence in the college classroom (“One in four,” 2009). Conflicts arise from many different reasons in the community college classroom. Academic egos, social class, high school locale, and other factors give reason to many conflicts in the college classroom.

Academic egos cause many conflicts in the college classroom. Students who excelled in high school and we applauded all the time for their efforts join the same type of person/people in the college classroom. Instead of being the “all star,” he or she is just like everyone else. When experiencing so much success in high school, at times, students can become very confident or over-confident. These students have a chip on their shoulder, so when they meet their equivalent in college, they may butt heads when they think they are right, but have conflicting views. History tells them they are right because they have always been right in high school.

A strategic plan to diffuse this situation is to cover all the bases before the course begins. On the first day, the professor should explain to each student they are all equal. They may not have been on equal playing grounds on the high school level, but in college, especially for a freshman, all students are equivalent. Since freshmen are around 18 years old, not too many of them have fully matured. It is necessary for the professor to explain that students may not always see eye to eye, but as an adult in a professional setting, being professional in a conflict is of high importance. Letting students know right off the bat they will conflict with others will help them prepare for the situation.

Social class can also be a factor that causes conflict in the college classroom. Even though college students should act professionally and like an adult, it does not always happen. At a private school where tuition is expensive, and even in public schools, students will conflict because social class. Not all students have the ability to write a check for college education, even at the community college level where tuition is usually cheaper. A lot of students do work-study programs, take out school loans, or work night jobs off campus to pay for school. Those who have the money to pay for school without working sometimes look down on these working students. While in the classroom, comments are sometimes made because it is very easy to pick out who has money and who does not. Just by looking at a way classmates dress can be an indicator. One who wears extremely nice and “in-style, labeled” clothes are easily picked out. Also, those who maybe wear their work clothes to class or wear cut up jeans are easy to pick out. It shouldn’t matter the social class of the students; both are in school to get an education, but students do not always see this. It roots back to their upbringing. If a rich student grew up watching his/her parents looking down on the less fortunate, he/she will probably do the same. Also, if a less fortunate student grew up watching his/her parents make fun of the nice, fancy things others
had, he/she will probably do the same. Besides parents being an influence, the media has a huge impact on how students view others. They watch television shows and read opinion columns that bash certain people because of who they are and/or what they believe (Scharper, 1996).

A strategic plan to avoid any conflict from social class in the college classroom would be to explain to the entire class, whether lower, middle, or upper class that everyone is equal. Whether they have $1000 or $1 in their wallets, they are getting the same education and learning the same material. In the classroom, everyone is part of a family that will work together on assignments, projects, and may even homework. Explaining this on the first day will enlighten all students on each level that nobody is better than anyone else. Equality is highlighted for a reason. In the classroom, nothing else matters than the education they are receiving. Letting students understand that if they do act out inappropriately, they could suffer suspending actions from the school. Another alternative may be to do some sort of service where the conflicting individuals work together.

For community college students, high school locale can be another factor that leads to student conflict. Two students who went to rival high schools may not realize they are not on this level any longer. They may bring this immature rivalry into the classroom, where there are no rivals, only equality. Many students feel that others should be labeled if they came from certain places, but if they actually get to know these people, they would realize they are all the same. They are all trying to get an education to better themselves or other people. Because rivalries should be taken seriously, threats and fights should be watched for in the classroom. Locale and egos wrapped into one can harm the classroom environment, but when it is all broken down, who should really care about where the next person went to high school?

A strategic plan to avoid conflict between two students from rival high schools would be to cover equality during orientation and the first day of class. An explanation about how pointless it is to care about where someone else went to high school may be all it takes for someone to realize his/her priorities. An understanding that they are working in a professional environment can really change a perspective. A briefing on the importance of classroom behavior will also help students realize they need to act professionally and this may help them avoid many conflicts. If there is a conflict, which will occur, professors should cover the proper and professional way to resolve it.

Conflicts will arise, but it is all in how students handle them. Professionalism should be the sole goals in conduct for college students. They should not worry about egos, high school locale, social class, or anything else when it comes to sharing an education with a classmate. They are all equals trying to achieve the same goal. John Doe’s transcript will read “John Doe,” not “John Doe, middle-class student from Ridgeport High School (go Ducks!).”

Works Cited
