



How Educators Can Help Calm Coronavirus (COVID-19) Hysteria

By Educator Barnes – March 10, 2020

Last week, my school had a sub who shared with students that she was from China. There is nothing wrong with people sharing with others where they were born and information about their country. Due to coronavirus hysteria and xenophobic comments from adults online, I should not have been surprised that students would also fall prey to unsettling beliefs that are not grounded in facts.

As educators, our jobs are to inform students and teach them the truth. In my piece, last month, "Addressing Tragedies and Controversial Current Events in the Classroom," I emphasized the importance of teachers addressing topics head-on and not shying away from them. Teachers should not allow misinformation to spread throughout the school.

Educators should focus on prevention. Any good doctor will tell you that prevention is the best medicine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provided these preventative measures:

- *Avoid close contact with people who are sick.*
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.*
- *Stay home when you are sick.*
- *Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.*
- *Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.*
- *Follow CDC's recommendations for using a facemask.*
 - *CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.*
 - *Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone in close settings (at home or in a health care facility).*
- *Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.*
 - *If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.*

For example, reminding students to wash their hands would be an appropriate response. Specifically, students should be reminded to wash their hands well. We have all seen people dab on some soap and splash some water for a couple of seconds. Those hands are not clean!

Teachers should pay attention to students who seem to be sick. Teachers are not doctors and should not make a diagnosis. Sending the student to the nurse would be the best course of action.

A student asked me if this is like the black plague. I assured the student this is not the plague. I also explained how medical professionals are sharing the flu has impacted more people than the coronavirus. A recent article from John Hopkins Medicine provided this data:

COVID-19: *Approximately 3,653 deaths reported worldwide; 17 deaths in the U.S., as of Mar. 8, 2020.*

Flu: *291,000 to 646,000 deaths worldwide; 12,000 to 61,000 deaths in the U.S. per year.*

Based on students' ages, providing this specific data might not be appropriate, but high school students should be mature enough to gain perspective from this data. We don't want younger students to believe that they are now going to die from the flu and create another hysteria. Instead, teachers could show Brain POP's video which sums up coronavirus for younger students.

Students should be reminded that just like people recover from the flu, a cold, or a sinus infection, people are recovering from this virus. Many of the people impacted had preexisting conditions or compromised immune systems.

Last, pay attention to guidance from the department of education in your state. In Indiana, the IDOE has already added a page to its website to share information.

Most importantly, teachers should address comments and provide factual information and encourage students to wash their hands. This situation reminds of when everyone was worried about H1N1, known as the swine flu. The panic around that passed, and the panic and hysteria around coronavirus shall pass too.