

Fair Isn't Always Equal: The Band Aid Lesson

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“It’s not fair!” Primary students tend to be very concerned with what is or isn’t fair. They notice everything, and wonder out loud why Johnny is reading with the teacher and they are not. They want to know why Susy gets to stay in the classroom at lunchtime and they have to eat in the cafeteria. They ask why they have to do other tasks that their peers aren’t doing.



This was becoming a growing problem for me during my previous school year, so I adapted an activity that I found online to meet the needs of my classroom.

The lesson begins with a discussion of what each student feels is fair or is not fair in our classroom. I created a chart of all their responses as they were given to me. Then, I asked each child to close their eyes and imagine they are at recess and they have just hurt themselves. They were to keep their pretend injury a secret until I called on each one of them. When I called the first child up to the front of the room, I heard “I fell off the monkey bars! I think I broke my leg!” I listened, told him that must really hurt, and then put a Band Aid on his wrist. The next child came up and said “I was having a race and I bumped my head really hard!” Once again I listened, said how sorry I was that he has hurt himself, and put a Band-Aid on his wrist. As each child came up, I heard about all their injuries: a knocked out a tooth, a sprained ankle, a cut belly, and other terrible things. Whatever they told me, though, I continued to put a Band-Aid on each of their wrists.

Very quickly the students start muttering to themselves and to each other about why on earth I would give them a band aid on their wrist when clearly their injuries didn't need that! I said, "But I wanted to treat you equally!" I waited for them to start making the connection. Finally, a student said, "You treated us all equally but you didn't give us what we needed." Aha! This was the moment when the rich discussion happened. We talked about what one student needing not necessarily being what their other friends need, or what they need. We discussed all the ways the children in our class are treated fairly. We also discussed that there are many instances when everyone is treated equally, especially when a treat is involved! I showed them a poster that I hung on the wall for the year: *Fair isn't everyone getting the same thing. Fair is everyone getting what they need in order to be successful.* This is something that stayed with them all year, and (unless I was passing out cookies) I never heard "It isn't fair!" again.

FAiR iS

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SUCCESSFUL