

On Tuesday, April 10th, I attended the seminar *Cultivating Community After Tragedy*, which was hosted by CSU's department of education. The panel featured four speakers: a principal from Eaton High School, a high school music teacher from Adams 12 District, an associate professor at CSU, and a prevention specialist for the Thompson Valley School District. All four of the speakers had some personal experience with tragedy, whether it was being a student or teacher during the Columbine shooting or having students that died from suicide, disease, or car accidents. The focus of the discussion was what tragedy looked like in schools and how teachers could handle it. Whether the tragedy involves one student or multiple students, tragedies hit the community hard and it's often difficult for students and teachers to regain some sort of normalcy in the aftermath of the event. The overall theme of the discussion was that community and empathy were important factors for helping students and teachers deal with tragedy. Though it is important to maintain some level of professionalism on the job, it's also okay for teachers to be human and grieve with the students (during and after school hours).

I have to admit that this was one of the most valuable college lectures that I've ever attended. I appreciate that each of the speakers had such compelling personal experiences that impacted their character as teachers. I also liked that two of the teachers on the panel were music teachers. Both of them discussed how important the arts were for helping students find normalcy after tragedy because art gave them the opportunity to reflect on and express the fundamental human experience. When students were too sad and angry to engage with class, the teachers encouraged them to put all their feelings into playing their instruments so the songs had more passion and liveliness. This made me realize that my position as an art teacher

mattered to the school community and it can play a therapeutic role in the face of tragedy. Some of the other panelists threw out some really good ideas that I would like to practice at the school I work at. I loved the idea of hosting a leadership seminar to teach students how to become positive school community members, and starting a parent education network for people that struggle with drug and alcohol addictions seemed like a really good idea too. I could also try to incorporate the mask activity as a way to build self-esteem and social-emotional skills with my students.

The last thing that I took away from the presentation was the quote: “Kids who are loved at home come to school to learn. Kids who are not loved at home come to school to be loved.” I believe that there are kids who are in one category or the other, and I also believe that kids can fluctuate between both of these things. I often feel like I’ve come to school to learn and be loved by my community, and there have been certain school environments where I didn’t get either of those things. But what it does make me realize is that school is a very important and influential place to be in. It plays a major role in shaping who we are as kids and adults, and we all have to go through it. This lecture made it very clear that there is a heavy responsibility when it comes to being a teacher, but it is also a very noble one. I feel honored to be a teacher and I look forward to seeing how I grow, even in the face of tragedy.