TEACHING IS A REFLECTION OF ME

View Finder & Images by Rebecca Bathrick
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How did my knowledge and understanding of my racial identity and of those around me implicitly and explicitly impact my classroom during student teaching?

To visually represent my self reflections and deepen my answer to this question I used different colored origami cranes to represent student diversity, I created a classroom model with a larger white origami crane in the front of the classroom to represent my power and whiteness as an educator. This classroom model embodies the white dominant culture of the traditional “white” classroom that I experienced in my own education with rows of desks facing the teacher in the front of the room and ultimately the classroom that I taught in during my student teaching.

I chose to use origami cranes as model representations because traditionally, it is believed that if someone folded 1000 origami cranes, one’s wish would come true. It has also become a symbol of hope and healing during challenging times. As a result, it has become popular to fold 1000 cranes (in Japanese, called “senbazuru”) to make a wish. Even though I’m not folding 1000 origami for this project nor am I Japanese, I’m adopting the crane as a symbol of hope and healing to overcome my own unconscious racist biases I unknowingly brought with me into the classroom.

Using light and shadow, the larger white crane in front of the room casts a shadow unto the classroom. This is representative of Parker Palmer’s quote that teaching is a reflection of who we are.

“In fact, knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life – and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject – not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning.”

This model and the use of light and shadow represents the power and influence a teacher has and encourages a rise in consciousness on the impact of a teachers identity on their students, especially when considering racial identities.

Centering Race in a classroom is continuous process of learning about myself, my own racial identity, my students and their racial identities. This process is visually captured through a series of pictures that shows a process of the teacher shadow getting smaller and smaller and the student lights getting brighter and brighter. Again, being apart of a process, the shifting in awareness will end with the students’ light (representing individual racial identities) becoming an explicit part of the classroom culture but the shadows never go away completely because this work is never truly done.

This presentation of pictures was intentionally presented in a red view finder toy as a symbol of my own socialization and understanding of race that is rooted in my childhood. For me, I witnessed my grandparents adopt two black boys and save them from homelessness and/or foster care. Years later, I unknowingly and unwillingly then entered a classroom with a white savior bias that had an impact on my relationships with my students of color. Further examining my identity and my understanding of race will help me in the process of Centering Race in a classroom and ultimately build better and stronger relationships in order to better serve all my students.