CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND ANTI-RACIST BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS AND INSTRUCTION

Propaganda Posters by Jordan Ross
5th Grade
After taking a class called Centering Race and Unlearning Racism at University of Puget Sound, I more critically reflected on my student teaching experience and observations. My mentors and I did not talk about or acknowledge the races of our students, and how that might impact the classroom culture. In the moment I would say that my mentors fell into the notion of not seeing color, only seeing children and I did not challenge or discuss this with them. Upon reflecting now, I would say I was afraid to address race in my student teaching classroom for fear of being called racist. So, I explored the question how can I structure behavior expectations and instruction to be culturally responsive and anti-racist? I had recently been challenging my own expectations of how a classroom should operate and how students should behave in class, and I wanted to explore how I can challenge the white culture of classrooms and schools so that my own classroom is a safer and more equitable place for students of color.

Why propaganda posters?

I chose the propaganda poster format for this project because I think it is a powerful means to show a particular point of view that is biased or misleading. It allowed me to show the juxtaposition of expectations of student behavior and instruction based on my experiences versus basing them on student needs. The exclusive classroom is black and white to symbolically show a color blindness towards my diverse population of students and their needs, and the assumption that the white culture of the classroom in which I was successful in my own education would work for all students. The inclusive classroom conversely uses color to show my work towards strategies and expectations that are more anti-racist and culturally responsive to the individuals present in my class.

The visual nature of this project allowed me to display the layers of complexity to the question. While I am mainly explored how I can structure instruction delivery and behavior expectations to be more culturally competent and anti-racist, there are questions that build and grow from there. For example, how do I be culturally responsive to a student without engaging with stereotypes about their race and culture? For this reason, the people in the posters are represented by their shape and their color. They may share a color, but not the same shape, so students may appear to be the same race, but have completely different cultures, or vice versa.

Aside from this, the project has allowed me to analyze my own personal biases and biases about behavior and instruction. The following is an example of a reflection in which my personal biases became evident to me upon visiting my husband Clay’s classroom.

“I imagined a big black boy when Clay would come home and say that “Dean shouted out too many times today, so I had to send him out into the hallway. He got so mad, that he threw a chair and slammed the door so hard that the rubber stopper has receded into the wall.” After hearing these negative stories about Dean, I admit that I was scared of Dean and several other students as they filed into the classroom on the first morning I visited. Low and behold, Dean quickly became one of my favorites. He is a sweet black boy, with an infectious smile.”

I was scared of Dean, a 10-year-old child. And I assumed he was black. I don’t know when or where my notion of black men being associated with violence and criminal activity started, but I applied it to Dean. The exclusive classroom shows my view of students and how they should behave prior to uncovering my biases, and the inclusive classroom demonstrates my work towards bringing those to my conscious mind and working to break down the dominant white culture that I perpetuated.