FACILITATING RACIALLY CHARGED CONFLICT REPAIR BETWEEN STUDENTS

Conflict Repair Circle by Julianne Bonnell
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This alternative project is a portrayal of how I have explored the complexities of facilitating racially charged conflict repair between students. Although it represents a specific situation from my student teaching, this project has enhanced my overall learning and practice as an antiracist teacher because it allowed me to interrogate how my identity and current place in equity work inform how I facilitate conflict repair between my students. My reflection is critical because it has helped me clarify a way forward in becoming a more influential and effective antiracist teacher.

I chose to create a visual representation of the conflict repair that I attempted to facilitate in my student teaching, because I want to show how my role as facilitator impacted the other individuals in the conversation. This exploration of impact on each individual is important because it allows me to extract my behaviors that impeded student healing and identify ways in which I could have behaved to facilitate a more productive, student-led conversation. I intentionally painted the figures with a spattering of multiple colors to symbolize how I underestimated the situation, thinking that it would be a simple solution of having the student who was the target of a racist joke explain how she was feeling and having the student who told the racist joke apologize to her.

As a symbol of the complexity of the situation, the paint spatter also represents the messiness of healing, granting forgiveness, and developing empathy. The use of different colors represents the complexity of each person’s identities. The red figure being the student who told the joke, the orange figures being the student who was the target of the joke and her friend who was a bystander, and the yellow figures being myself and the student who helped facilitate the conflict repair (both of us were in facilitator roles, however I made her figure a lighter yellow to indicate her ability step back or fade out of the conversation tactfully to bring in the other students’ voices).

The flaps around the edges of the circle further symbolize my discovery of the complexity of the situation. On the outside of the flaps I have my actions toward each individual in the circle which oversimplified the issue by stifling what could have been a risky, but meaningful conversation between the students. I describe how I approached each individual in the situation in my role as facilitator and my intentions behind those approaches. On the inside of the flaps, I wrote the potential impacts of my actions to show the reality of the layers of emotion and interpersonal dynamics that were present in my interactions with the students. I also wrote my remaining questions as I continue to consider how my facilitator moves could support students in racially charged conflict repair in my future career.

By exploring the impact of my actions as a facilitator through this alternative format, I can see more clearly where I had opportunities to facilitate meaningful self-expression, development of empathy, and healing for all of my students who were involved. This will inform my practice as an antiracist teacher moving forward because it has illuminated more effective approaches that I can take as a facilitator to build that environment while giving the students the space to take ownership over the conversation which, in itself, could be healing for them.