COMING TO CONSCIOUSNESS: REWORKING RACIAL TENSIONS IN STUDENT TEACHING

A Play in Three Acts by Hayley Rathburn
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I created this three-act theatrical script to expose complexities and racial tensions that were involved in three separate instances between me and black male students during my student teaching experience. These instances were all fueled by my lack of awareness regarding the extent to which my white-centered background and positionality has significantly affected my perspectives toward students and classrooms.

The script is intended to be an exploration of how I could have altered these three instances during student teaching so as to be less harmful to male students of color. Each act begins with a scene written as the incident really occurred. There is no dramatization or added content. Every piece of dialogue and stage direction depicts what happened in my Sophomore English classroom. The second scene of each act shows how I would change these interactions now that I have reflected back on them and done research into critical race and anti-racist teaching theories. The changes are all bolded in the second scene of each act in order to demonstrate the differences between what really happened in the first scene and an option of what I wish I would have said or done differently in retrospect. These changes are by no means included to imply that there is a “quick fix” to deep, systemic issues such as racism, prejudice, or bias. Rather, they are meant to demonstrate my personal thinking as a beginning white educator and the steps I would take to alter these specific incidents.

Creating this script has helped me see the power of language and internal dialogue. Before writing this script and examining myself from a removed, third-person perspective, I did not realize how much the judgements, assumptions, and biases I carried in my mind negatively affected my interactions with these three students. While painful and even shocking to uncover these biases within myself, it has been crucial for my future teaching practice to engage in this work and begin my journey of culturally competent teaching.

This project serves as an example of my commitment to this work as it provides a framework for my thinking that I will continue to use as I enter the full-time teaching force. It is my hope that this project will aid other white educators in examining their own biases and provide a way to rethink interactions with their own students. While the process of self-reflection is difficult, it is our duty as educators to continually engage in this work in order to strive to create equitable classrooms for all of our students.

Works Cited
