
UP AGAINST A WALL: COMBATING FATIGUE AND OPPRESSION IN ANTIRACIST EDUCATION

*Interactive Brick Wall by Erika Horwege
Elementary Social Studies/Language Arts*



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ERIKA HORWEGE ARTIST STATEMENT

“Just for the record darling, not all positive change feels positive in the beginning”
- S.C. Lourie

I wanted to represent the opposition and fatigue I experienced in working to integrate antiracist teaching into my own teaching practice. I also wanted to show how institutionalized racism has strong foundations in society, blocks access for groups and individuals, is composed of many pieces cemented together to form a larger whole, and **that** trying to dismantle it is overwhelming. Most bricks are white, to represent the dominant group who created this wall, but there are also bricks of color to show that non-white individuals are trapped in and part of the same system that harms them. Because doors represent opportunity and access, I bricked up a doorway to convey the fatigue and defeat that I, and many of my cohort, have felt during this work.

Yet the wall also shows individual effort does matter, and that working together will, over time, make meaningful and lasting change. My effort might not make a visible or immediate difference, but could allow for future change. I might not be able to change someone’s mind with a single conversation, but the interaction could chip away at the resistance. These can lead to breakthroughs that allow light to shine through and, over time, can break down walls. Sometimes I will not make a difference; this too is part of the process. Change is not a product or reward that I am owed because I put in the effort.

In recognizing that this work is lifelong and has no completion, the doorway shows that even after breaking down walls progression through the door leads to new challenges. Though this program has always emphasized that teaching and antiracist education are processes, I struggled to internalize this. This format allowed me to visualize my dilemma and realizations, to better understand and examine them, and to create action steps to help me speak out for antiracist teaching and against racism.

Because representing my thoughts in a visual form helped me progress, I chose to create this project in an interactive format. While most bricks are firmly cemented in place, some can be pushed out. These bricks are not visibly identifiable, so anyone interacting with the wall must try multiple points to make an impact. Even after removing a brick, the wall still stands, showing that this work is ongoing within individuals, education, and society as a whole. The process truly is the product.

References

Okun, T. (2010). *The Emperor Has No Clothes: Teaching About Race and Racism to People Who Don't Want to Know*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

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