FINDING OPPORTUNITIES TO CENTER RACE IN A MATH CLASSROOM: A TOOLBOX FOR REFLECTION

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The classroom I student taught in lacked racial diversity from the students who were present, to what was on classroom walls, to what was included into the curriculum. Specifically, the math curriculum was fast paced, emphasized procedural fluency, provided to me, and expected to be taught in an I do, we do, then you do format. Altogether, this made the classroom very standardized and placed me at the center of student learning. Through my exploration, I discovered my own teacher agency by focusing on what I can do within my classroom to incorporate race into a curriculum and method that is considered fairly rigid. I see students engaging with race and each other through curriculum as well as planned and impromptu discussions. Every time students interact whether academic or social, they have the opportunity to wrestle with bias.

Therefore, I created my own physical toolbox you can interact with. The toolbox is all white symbolizing the dominant race and “American” culture within my classroom. The outside of the box reflects how I saw my classroom. On one side of the box is 8 brown dots representing my students of color surrounded by 18 white dots representing my white students. I am on the opposite side represented as a brown dot because I am a person of color. The distance between the students and myself also symbolizes how I saw myself as the “giver of knowledge” and the students were the “receivers.” There were many dynamics at play symbolized by the wheel of power on the front that were not made visible, thus it is not filled out. The box is sealed with red tape that you physically must remove to open the box to reach the antiracist strategies within, just like I had put in work to move past my own defeatist attitude and think critically about antiracist teaching practices. I focused on specific facets of teaching to guide my thinking using Hackman’s (2005) Five Essential Components for a Social Justice Classroom as a guide. Once the box is opened, the strategies I gathered reveal themselves. You must rifle through them, thinking about how each one contributes to an antiracist classroom. On the back, each one is labeled with a color and description of how I see it being used in the classroom. Do you agree? What modifications or changes would you make? You may pull objects out of the box just like how I intend to bring these practices out of the box and into the classroom.