

Storytelling and Technology as Tools for Anti-Racist Teaching

Stories are powerful. They can transport us to different places and times, ignite emotions, bring communities together, and foster empathy. In classrooms, stories can uphold the status quo or foster more equitable literacies. Centering the narratives and ways of speaking of children and families of Color, stories can serve as a site for the enactment of anti-racist pedagogy (Alderman et al., 2019).

While the voices, values, and images of Black, Indigenous, and other children of Color are often marginalized and silenced in and by the curriculum (Hester, 2018), we posit that centering family voices via oral storytelling in the curriculum is a potent way to teach in the pursuit of justice while challenging the Eurocentrism and print-oriented literacy instruction that are the norm in most of our schools (Souto-Manning et al., 2020). Similarly, using technology to document and amplify the stories shared by children and their families makes them visible to the larger community, communicating that they matter.

With the belief that it is imperative for children to develop positive racial self-identities and mechanisms to interrupt the negative overt and covert messages of white supremacy and racism (Johnson, 2017), we invite you to step into our pre-kindergarten classroom in Brooklyn, NY to see how we used the stories of children's names and built an app to empower our students, engage with families, honor their cultural practices and ways of speaking, and build community.

As Latinx early childhood teachers committed to racial justice, we share our explorations, attending to the development of racial literacy in pre-kindergarten (Guinier,

2004). We share books by and about people of Color through the lenses of critical literacy, discuss unfairness related to racial hierarchies in US society, and explore how children re-presented their identities through art. Delving beyond the descriptive level, we attend to the racial grammar in place.

Positioning families and children centrally in the curriculum, we also asked families to share a two-minute audio recording with the story of how their children got their names (Souto-Manning et al., 2018). Then, COVID-19 closed our school. This led us to reorganize our curriculum. This reorganization offered the opportunity to teach differently; we decided to work collaboratively with families to interview the children in our class. Family expertise was fundamental. Our ongoing communication and partnership, allowed us to bring these personal stories to life, bringing us closer in a time when we were forced to be physically apart.

We share how we featured children's stories in our newsletter sent to families by email. This allowed for the children to learn about and from each other and included written information, pictures, as well as the audio-recorded story of their names. In consultation with the child, we included activities for families to try at home, cogenerated curriculum (Emdin, 2017).

Name stories were so rich that we decided to document them in an App using a free, internet-based, intuitive app-builder that does not require advanced tech-savviness nor knowledge of coding. Our collective stories kept our community together. Further, they allowed us to delve into issues of anti-racism, and to dismantle commonly held albeit white supremacist beliefs and values.

In sharing our practice and the stories of the children in our class, we do not ascribe to offer simplistic solutions to the deeply situated endeavor of teaching. Instead, we hope that the stories of our classroom can shed light on other settings and inspire teachers to keep going on their journeys toward being and becoming anti-racist educators. Further, we offer resources for action with the understanding that, as June Jordan affirmed (1978), “we are the ones we’ve been waiting for.”