



Stuck Improving Mini Lecture Series

CHAPTER 3

Courageously Confrontational School Culture

Educators hate fights. When a fight happens, it's violent. But school violence is more than physical and verbal in nature. Schools throughout the US would operate and feel very different if White educators abhorred and confronted the violence of racism and white supremacy as much as they abhorred the violence of Black students fighting. The best approach to challenging all forms of school-based violence is the cultivation and maintenance of a courageously confrontational school culture.

Courageous confrontation refers to individual and collective practices of directly addressing episodes, events, incidents, and interactions of racism and wrong doing with the same seriousness you'd use to address a physical fight. Courageous confrontation demands critiquing racist ideas, behaviors, and social structures that harm Black and Brown students. **Being courageously confrontational is an essential part of creating educational equity.**

So what does it look like? A courageously confrontational school culture has three routine characteristics.

First, people confront problems head on. When I was in middle school, there were far too many fist fights at my school. And this is for sure. If you got into a physical fight, the teachers and administrators dealt with it. Head on. I know because I was in my fair share of fistfights. Now that I research and study schools, I realize that more often than not students fight when they feel they have no other options to establish or maintain a sense of respect. The general feeling of not belonging and not having a sense of where to go or who to turn to for support is itself violent. That's what educators need to address.



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Second, people default to racism and racial socialization as a central, but not singular, lens for making sense of school-based problems. Most people - especially white people - assume that problems people of color experience are “not about race.” This is where we get the idea of pulling the race card. Well...educators in courageously confrontational schools keep the race card on the table, until there’s a compelling reason or evidence to take it off.

Third, people understand that although it doesn’t feel like it, conflict and confrontation are actually opportunities to learn. Learning from and through conflict offers the opportunity to at minimum acknowledge and at best to forgive, heal, and accept responsibility for the wrongs that people experience in their school communities.

Conventional schools have either congenial or collegial cultures. In congenial cultures, people put on a front of being “nice” and getting along. In collegial cultures, people are supportive and collaborative. And the sense of support and collaboration ensures people get along. But neither of these are transformative.

For Black and Brown students, getting along isn’t good enough. They need and deserve intolerance for the status quo and a sense of urgency for transformation ...you know similar to how people feel the need to address and stamp out acts of physical violence.



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