

Constructing the

INNOCENT®

Classroom

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Constructing the Innocent Classroom

Creating an enhanced environment for racially marginalized children that will positively influence social and academic results.



The Challenge

How can we come to “know” our students well enough to construct an environment that encourages the fullest engagement from the most wounded?



- We must first acknowledge despite all that we have absorbed from popular culture and the virulent racial stereotypes that persist about them, all of the children who sit before us are innocent or have the capacity to reacquire what innocence they have lost.

There are three things that must be said at the outset:

- Race is a social construction
- The subconscious mind is more powerful than we are often willing to admit; and
- The knowledge of one's own innocence is fundamental to our capacity to grow.

If these three ideas can be internalized, it is possible to imagine that the restoration and protection of a child's sense of their own innocence is also possible.

- The internalization of these negative narratives by children actually is translated into guilt.
- Research on “stereotype consciousness” validates this assertion.

The Research on Stereotype Consciousness and Threat

- Clark McKowen defines stereotype consciousness as “knowledge that others endorse beliefs about the characteristics of ethnic groups.”

- The danger of stereotype consciousness, however, is that it can very easily trigger stereotype threat – “the fear that one’s behavior may confirm or be understood in terms of a negative stereotype associated with one’s social group,” (Steele, 1999).

- Educators will be able to construct an environment that offers the best opportunity to succeed in school.
- Such an environment will foster the idea that students enter the school building as innocent children and are able to leave the weight of their “guilts” outside.

Definitions

Guilt

The cumulative impact of negative stereotypes that affect attitude and behavior. The absence of innocence.

This feeling of guilt is more of a translation of the negative expectations that envelop their lives than it is a statement of fact. Unfortunately most of our children are aware, at a very early age of this feeling of guilt and exhibit its negative consequences before they even know what it is that motivates their behavior.

Definitions

Innocence

Our new definition of innocence can be understood as the condition that results from the reduction, minimization, neutralization or elimination of the guilt that develops from stereotypes, popular negative narratives and iconography

Definitions

Good

“Perhaps we may define it as that for the sake of which everything else is done.”

To put it another way, there is a reason why a child does what it is they are doing. Why they think the way they do. Why they respond to us in a particular fashion. We can't understand what that is if we consciously or unconsciously rely on stereotypes to discern the origin of their impulses. We must seek out that child's good.

Definitions

Epistemology

The way you think about what you think about

The Good

- Belonging
- Free
- Smart
- Safe
- Untroubled
- Happy
- Connected
- Successful
- Accepted
- Validated
- Hope
- Seen
- Cared for
- Survival
- Normal
- Respected
- Leadership
- Stable



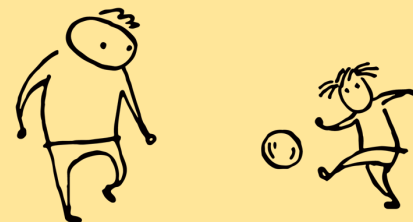
Observation

What are you seeing from the individual child?

- Behaviors, what the child is showing you

What do you truly know about this child?

- Who they are, what they are willing to reveal to you



Building a Practice:

Commit to three new ways to get to know these children prior to our next session.

Come prepared to talk about what you learned about each of these children.

