

ARE WE REALLY?

A Play Addressing Issues of Race and Prejudice

By

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Based on the project

“We talk, and we talk, and we talk, until we begin to TALK”

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Introduction

This project was inspired by the work done by the Fifth Cohort of the Faculty Alliance (formerly known as the Early Childhood Higher Education Faculty Initiative). The Faculty Alliance, supported by the Federal Head Start Bureau in partnership with Wheelock College, Pacific Oaks College, ACCESS, and in collaboration with Bank Street College and the Erikson Institute, was a unique national initiative designed to enhance the capacity of faculty members from two and four year colleges to assist Head Start, child care, and early childhood teachers to complete and extend their education. I was fortunate to be included in this effort through my participation in the Fifth Cohort of the Faculty Alliance. I am honored to have had the opportunity to explore, share, and learn with an extraordinary group of dedicated child developmentalists who came together from all parts of the U.S. three different times during the years 2002 and 2003.

This specific project was inspired by our work together on the topic of racism. In our efforts to go beyond our current understanding and create new levels of knowing that we could share with our students we met some roadblocks, some tender situations, and many insecurities on just how to approach our desire to "know" with "sensitivity" ways of asking about others' experiences. I welcomed the exploration but did worry about how I could best include others' explorations as well. Somewhere in this process I am grateful that one of the participants, Leona Skunk Cap, shared the phrase "we talk, and we talk, and we talk, until we begin to TALK," that has become the title of this project of exploration and support for furthering our discussions because it so clearly expresses the need to open dialogue and keep it going until we better understand each other. I know that this is a topic that will take me a lifetime to try and understand its dynamics. Thank you to all of my teachers.

My husband, a playwright, has for many years been writing plays about how human beings break trust with one another over issues of misunderstanding and ignorance (race and ethnicity being central to many of those issues). As I took the discussions back to my family and shared the thinking of my Faculty Alliance colleagues, the idea of creating a series of scenes in which actors explore some of the issues that can become topics of discussion (or avoided topics of discussion) came into being. As a result we have created a number of scenes that are meant to stimulate discussion in a safe environment. The scenes are meant to be shared with others and discussion questions are included to focus attention on specific issues. We have used these scenes within a process called World Café (see theworldcafe.com for more information), over dinner at gatherings, and in classroom discussions. Please use what we have created in the spirit of sharing and learning, contact us with stories about how you have used them. Contact us at the address above or email us at cmckay@sub.edu. We look forward to sharing other parts of this project with you.

CARY

Hi ... (explain what you are about to do, but make sure when you are finished you introduce yourself, then Angela, then MONICA)

MONICA

Given our limited time, we would like to invite you to place any after thoughts in the reflection boxes in the back of the room.

CARY

Oh, MONICA, I'm sorry.

MONICA

For what?

CARY

Introducing you last. Here we are about to discuss the varied forms of racism and I introduce you last. I should've introduced you first. How insensitive of me.

ANGELA

You're right. I should've been last.

CARY

No, it should've been me.

ANGELA

I'm academically the newest one in the group so I should be last.

CARY

Me. I am introducing the World Café, so I should go last.

ANGELA

No. Me!

CARY

Monica, who should've been introduced last?

MONICA

Who cares?

CARY

What?

MONICA

Who cares? We're a team, right? Being a team makes us a circle. There is no real first or last.

CARY

Monica, I know you're being accepting of our insensitivity, but there is no way you should've been last.

ANGELA

Listing you last suggests we have accepted the values of institutional racism. We must let everyone know that is not the case.

MONICA

(To CARY)

Is that the way you felt?

CARY

Certainly not until I did it and then I realized what I had done.

MONICA

Except for listing me last, what exactly what did you do?

CARY

I offered recognition to myself and ANGELA before you, which suggested that your contribution to the group had not been of the same value as ours.

MONICA

Who would've thought that?

CARY

I'm not sure, but —we cannot take any chances

ANGELA

My God, Monica, what are you doing? You're of color! In a racist world! Of course, there will be those who will see any hint of a hierarchy as a slight. We have to be careful.

CARY

When introducing a team, for example, it usually doesn't enter into the picture ----

MONICA

When they're all white?

CARY

When they're all white, yes. But

MONICA

But because I'm different, I should be treated differently?

ANGELA

She didn't say that. What she said ----

MONICA

I heard her. To tell you guys the truth, I had been a member of this team -- happily believing that we were working in harmony.

CARY

We are.

MONICA

No. It's two white chicks and me.

ANGELA

That's not true!

MONICA

The discussion isn't about who should be listed first or last according to seniority. It's about who should be listed in what order because of race. I was not the one who brought up race. You did. My God! I hadn't felt it necessary to consider either one of you racist until now.

ANGELA

We're not.

CARY

(To audience)
Are we?

Discussion Questions

In what ways must we be “careful” of the racism expressed in our everyday worlds? When have you run into an everyday situation that became racially charged or uncomfortable?

How do these behaviors create stress/tensions/discomfort and how do we react? How do others (who might be different from us) react? How do we expect others to react? What happens when someone becomes defensive because of these behaviors?

CHOOSING

CARY

When deciding which students should take with us to the next conference and who should be asked to pay their own way, what recommendations do you have for criteria for deciding?

ANGELA

Income.

CARY

If you're rich, it's no hardship to pay your own way?

ANGELA

Exactly. While I know that no one in our group is rich, there are some who make more money than others.

CARY

Monica?

MONICA

Scholarship. The better students should get some reward.

CARY

Okay, and I think we should look at dedication to the field.

ANGELA

Grades outside our department. After all, are they representing us well throughout the school?

MONICA

Right.

CARY

And maturity. Anything else?

(ANGELA and MONICA shake their heads)

CARY (Continuing)

Okay. We're through with the criteria. Income. Scholarship. Dedication. Maturity. Okay?

(ANGELA and MONICA nod in agreement)

CARY (Continuing)

Now, looking at the list of names, there are three. Angelica Lopez, Katasha Booker, and April Pearce.

ANGELA

Well, April's out.

CARY

Why's that?

ANGELA

She's white. If we chose her we could be accused of racism.

MONICA

That's not a good reason to put her out of the running.

CARY

Certainly not. Especially, if we're unanimous in our decision.

MONICA

We have to be unanimous?

ANGELA

We should try to be, certainly, if we choose April.

MONICA

Well uh I don't think I could decide for her.

CARY

Fine. I don't know her very well. (To MONICA) What reservations do you have about her?

MONICA

Well, it's not that I have reservations about her but well, to be honest, I have certain friends who would be very angry with me if I voted for a white girl over a black girl.

CARY

What if she's the best?

MONICA

Some of these friends go to church with me. Some are friends my husband and I have had for a very long time.

ANGELA

That's racist.

MONICA

Not according to them. There needs to be an adjustment for all the times it worked against us. According to my friends, people of color can be prejudiced, but we can't be racist because we don't have the power.

CARY

What?

MONICA

Being racist means that you hold other races down strictly because of color. We can't hold anyone down. We can irritate them, but we don't have the power to hold them down. So while we CAN be prejudiced, we CAN'T be racist. Racism is the privilege of the ruling class.

CARY

I do not even want to go there. What about Angelica?

ANGELA

If we choose her, it'll look like a compromise between Katasha and April.

CARY

Then we have to drop Angelica. So, it's between April and Katasha. I'd like it to be unanimous, if possible.

MONICA

I have to vote for Katasha.

ANGELA

And I have to vote for Angelica I ... Well, I have the same issues as Monica. I have friends who would be angry if I didn't vote for Angelica.

CARY

Really?

(ANGELA nods. CARY'S surprised, but says nothing. Turns to audience)

CARY

Can we get a unanimous vote?

Discussion Questions

How should race (or other characteristics) be considered when making decisions?

How are established criteria reflective of institutionalized racism (or other “isms” for that matter)? Do some criteria need to be changed? Do some need to be upheld? Why or why not?

What would happen if we used different criteria for decision making (for example, measures of motivation instead of grades, measures of persistence instead of test scores)?

IT IS PERSONAL

MONICA

Cary, Angela We've haven't addressed the issue before, but should we discuss racism as to whether or not it effects our group?

ANGELA

Why bring it up? We haven't had any problems. Why take the chance of creating some?

MONICA

That surprises me, Angela. What “problems” could be raised “by chance?”

CARY

You're right. We should probably let it drop.

MONICA

Fine, if it's uncomfortable for you.

CARY

It's not uncomfortable. It's just not necessary. I'm sure we don't see you as someone who is Black.

MONICA

Oh? What do you see?

CARY

You know what I mean. I see you as asjust one of us.

MONICA

And "being one of us" is being white?

ANGELA

Monica, I think that what Cary meant is that there are no differences between us.

MONICA

Oh, really? Your cousin got beaten by the cops by "mistake" because they thought he was gang kid? Then when they realized what they had done, they blamed him for being "aggressive" with them. Were you the one trying to remove graffiti from your fence when a total stranger stops their car and starts to yell at you and cuss you out for spoiling the neighborhood?

ANGELA

What I meant ----

MONICA

By the way, do you like Cary's house?

ANGELA

Yes. It's quite nice.

MONICA

(To CARY)

You said Angela's was pretty, right?

CARY

Yes.

MONICA

Do you like mine?

CARY

I ... I haven't seen it.

MONICA

What about you, Angela, do you like mine?

ANGELA

I haven't been there.

CARY

You haven't invited us.

MONICA

Ask me how I like yours or yours, Angela.

(Both ANGELA and CARY remain silent)

I haven't been invited there, either. And actually, I've invited you twice to my home for work sessions, but both times it was decided that it was easier at school.

CARY

That's where all the materials were.

MONICA

Did you know I live in a black section of town?

ANGELA

No.

MONICA

Does it surprise you?

CARY

What are you getting at?

MONICA

My guess is that you assumed I live in a black section of town and were hesitant to come there. My guess is that you live in white areas — right?

CARY

Yes. Well, I live close to my work.

MONICA

And a woman of color coming into your home would cause attention from your neighbors?

CARY

I don't think so.

MONICA

Would they see me?

CARY

Probably. There's several retired people who are home all day, and they keep pretty close tabs on things.

MONICA
Do you talk with them?

CARY
Of course.

MONICA
Would they ask about me when they saw you?

CARY
Probably. But they're very nosy. They ask about all my friends who visit me.

MONICA
What would you tell them?

CARY
That you were a co-worker.

MONICA
Not a friend?

CARY
What?

MONICA
You said they ask about "all your friends." Yet, I'm not a "friend" from work. I'm a "co-worker." I wasn't even a colleague.

CARY
This is ridiculous.

MONICA
Is it?

CARY
Monica, I don't care what you say, I look upon you as a friend, period.

ANGELA
Me, too.

MONICA
That's great. By the way, how are Randy and Rebecca doing, Angela?

ANGELA
Fine. Both love the new school.

MONICA

(To CARY)
And Kirk and Conan?

CARY

Good.

MONICA

And my children darn I forgot their names. Can either of you help me out?

(Both CARY and ANGELA stare blankly at her)

I thought “friends” would know the names of each other’s children. Cary, your husband had heart surgery. Angela, yours had prostate surgery. And mine had Darn, I can’t remember. Can either of you help me out?

(Again they remain silent)

Thanks friends.

CARY

I am not racist.

ANGELA

Me, neither.

CARY

This whole time today has been to try to combat racism.

MONICA

How do you combat what you can’t even see?

CARY

I see it.

MONICA

How can you “see” it at a predominantly white college with predominantly white colleagues?

CARY

What have we been talking about?

MONICA

Not much. Superficiality really.

ANGELA

Don’t call me racist. I am not a racist!

MONICA

Angela, you’re a big city girl. Name five gangs.

ANGELA

Crips. Bloods. Nuevo Lobos. White Fence. Wah Ching.

MONICA

Two black, two Hispanic and one Asian. Where are the white gangs?

ANGELA

Whites don't
(Stops)

MONICA

Have gangs? Aryan Brotherhood. Sound black or white? What about Texas Mafia, Aryan Circle or the Nazi Lowriders. They've got them. But the white press and the white readers aren't scared of them. The others scare them. They write about them. They make a big deal out of them. Whites know about them. Believe me, the minority community knows about the others. They have to deal with being their targets. They know that if there is a murder reported in the news and there is not picture the guy has got to be white!

CARY

Darn it, Monica, what are you saying? That because the press sensationalizes gangs I'm a racist?

MONICA

Yep. Well meaning. Trying not to be. But still a racist.

ANGELA

Me, too?

MONICA

Sure. The two of you don't realize how easy it is for you to be white. You just were—with everything tat comes with that privilege. Everything was automatically available to you and all you had to do was live and decide which of lifes' many choices you would make. Being Black is different. There are those who hate you because you're black, think you're good in sports but not business, play with our "cute kids" but won't talk to us adults, don't want you, don't like you If you're white, you're just right. If you're brown, hang around, if you're black, get back, waaaayyyy back. And our choices? Not as many—not if you want to survive

ANGELA

How does that make us racist?

MONICA

Because by ignoring my color, by being "color blind," you are committing one of the most racist acts there is — you are denying my identity. I am Black. I have a background and life that is different from yours. I will share with you and I will appreciate yours, but I will not give mine up nor let you take it away from me to assuage your guilt.

CARY

I thought you guys wanted us to be "color blind?"

MONICA

"You guys?" You mean, you Black people?

CARY

Darn it, Monica, you make almost everything I say sound racist.

MONICA

It is.

ANGELA

You don't want us to be accepting? My god I have been dealing with this my whole life. I do know what you are talking about. For the sake of unity today, I haven't said anything, But I have to speak out now. All day you've been judging me by the color of my skin. I'm Hispanic. I'm not "white." I have had to deal with the fact that being Hispanic just puts me in the middle. "If you're brown, hang around." When a white spits on a black, he's "racist." When he spits on someone who's Hispanic, he's "prejudiced." When the discussion of "racism" occurs, invariably it is white versus black. Hispanics don't count. And in my case, I really don't count. Like others, you assumed I was white and have had the same experiences that Cary has had. Not true. I was raised in Boyle Heights. But because of the color of my skin, I'm either considered white or I'm treated as if I am just the token, easily accepted because I look mostly white, but still different. Frankly, I welcome any attempt at color blindness as long as someone is making an effort.

MONICA

Angela, ignoring our color only helps the white folk forget who we are and what we've had to overcome in spite of white indifference and white hatred.

ANGELA

(after a beat)

You know, you are right about that.

MONICA

Of course! Being "color blind" means the "whites" can forget 250 years of slavery. 20th century hangings. Whippings.

ANGELA

And being "color blind" allows "whites" to forget stealing our land, making those who owned the land second-class citizens. And exploiting brown poverty.

MONICA

And exploiting black poverty.

ANGELA

And that's just here at home.

MONICA

There is a whole world out there that feels the color line.

ANGELA

Absolutely, there IS a whole world out there that feels the color line.

CARY

What can I do?

MONICA

You can live the American dream, not the American perspective. You can truly believe all men are created equal and act that way. You will have to stop segregating yourselves and join a global community where all races, all people, are respected and, even, admired, by you for their differences.

CARY

Monica. When all is said and done, I respect you. I admire you. I truly do love you as a friend. I love you both as friends.

ANGELA

And I love you. And, Monica, I love you, too..

MONICA

I think you two love me as much as I love you. We are friends. We are loving colleagues. And we are different and

(Smiling)

let's not forget it!.

CARY

Oh, I don't think we will.

ANGELA

Count on it!

CARY

When it comes to being a racist and not realizing it, you and Angela have really made quite thought-provoking statements and I agree with you a hundred percent.

(To audience)

Do you?

Discussion Questions