Chapter 12

Raising Conscious Kids: A Community-Based Approach to Anti-Bias Education

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ABSTRACT

Early experiences in life exposed the author to the harsh realities of racism. These experiences fueled her desire to create a non-profit organization, we are, to challenge and disrupt not only interpersonal racism, but also systemic. Together with a group of parents, educators, doctoral students, and community activists, the author co-created a curriculum for an anti-racism summer camp for children. This camp embodies what Nel Noddings characterizes as caring for the whole child. In this chapter, the author reveals how her experiences with race led to the creation of we are summer camps. She makes connections to Noddings and beliefs about care, provides an overview of the camps, and makes recommendations for parents and educators who are charged with raising conscious kids.

INTRODUCTION

Early experiences in life exposed me to the harsh realities of racism. These experiences fueled my desire to create a non-profit organization, we are, to challenge and disrupt not only interpersonal racism, but also systemic racism. Together with a group of parents, educators, doctoral students, and community activists, we co-created a curriculum for an anti-racism summer camp for children. This camp embodies what Nel Noddings (2005) characterizes as caring for the whole child. In this chapter, I reveal how my experiences with race led to the creation of we are Summer Camps, make connections to Noddings and beliefs about care, provide an overview of the camps, and make recommendations for parents and educators who are charged with raising conscious kids.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5748-7.ch012
WHEN RACE BECAME REAL

Race became real to me at five-years-old. I was a kindergartener who loved learning. In a rural, predominantly White town in North Carolina, we all sat at round tables where I was the only Black child at the table. One day during class, I watched quietly as she (a White girl) went around the table, moving from one classmate to the next inviting everyone to her birthday party, except me. Curiously, I asked my friend why she had skipped me. She replied, “You can’t come to my birthday party because my dad said that Black people are not allowed in our home.” Race became real to me at five-years-old.

At this moment, I do not recall what I felt in that moment. Maybe I experienced hurt and some confusion, as I did not understand how my exclusion was related to the color of my skin. I do remember, though, recounting the story to my mom. Riding in our car, my dad was driving, and I told my mom what happened. With a shocked expression, she quickly turned her head to look at my dad. While there was a lot that she could have said, in that moment my mom chose to explain to me that we should not invite ourselves to other people’s birthday parties.

That would suffice until it happened again in second grade. I was with my Girl Scout troop. We were in the community, doing service work to earn a badge. I was again, the only Black girl in the troop. Momentarily, I stepped away from the group but noticed they were in a huddle, so I walked back to join them. Upon my arrival, a deafening hush fell and everyone stopped talking. I asked my closest friend in the group why everyone had grown so quiet. She looked at me and lamented, “Ronda, please don’t be mad at me, but I’m having a birthday party today, and my dad said that you can’t come because you’re Black.” Race became real to me again at seven-years-old.

At seven, I understood more than I did at five. This time, I was hurt and instinctively in that moment I thought, what was wrong with me? Something must be wrong with me. I went home after the event and slumped on our couch in the living room. My mom caught me sulking and asked what was wrong. I shared what had occurred and before she could ask, I assured her that I did not try to invite myself to the party. This time, in that moment, my mother’s response was more poignant than previously. She spoke clearly and concisely to me about how White people used to hate Black people due to the color of our skin, the institution of slavery, and Lincoln freeing the slaves. She did her best with helping me understand our country’s complex, racialized history. And in that moment, race became very real to me.

These two narratives are important because they mark my racial awakening. Anytime I went to an event or was invited into a space, I would come home and tell my mom, “I was the only Black girl there,” or “There were only two Black people there.” I would walk into a room, and instinctively get a feel for how many Black people were present. I wish that I could say that my last experience occurred at seven years old; however, the basic design of racism inevitably led to additional experiences. All of my experiences, beginning at age five, continued to shape me and push me to better understand racism and consequently, how I can use my talents to help others, particularly children, cultivate anti-racist identities.

Why We Are?

I began the initial brainstorming for we are in the spring of 2015. we are, is a non-profit organization which stands for working to extend anti-racist education. Multiple events had transpired that increased my pursuit for racial justice. George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watchman, followed and murdered Trayvon Martin, an African American teenager, as he walked to his home carrying an Arizona Tea and a pack of Skittles. George Zimmerman was later acquitted of killing Trayvon Martin. Alicia Garza, Patrisse
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