

ACTIVITY: GRAFFITI WALL

Overview of GRAFFITI WALL

The “Graffiti Wall” activity was designed to support teachers in unpacking some of the deficit language often heard in school settings particularly about students and their parents from marginalized or non-dominant groups as well as the schools which these children attend. Teachers are then asked to develop counter-narratives that can disrupt this language when they hear it used in schools.

NOTE: This activity was based on one developed by Julia M. Aguirre, PhD at the University of Washington Tacoma (*see reference below).

Objective(s)

Teachers will...

- Brainstorm language they have heard used about students from marginalized or non-dominant groups in the school setting and about the community in which those students and their families live
- With the guidance of the facilitator, teachers will identify the deficit language that has emerged from the brainstorming
- Consider the impact on both students and teachers of the use of such language in the school setting
- Consider the impact of situations outside of the classroom that position students
- Consider ways to disrupt the use of this language in the school setting; develop counter-narratives to deficit thinking

Materials Needed

- A large piece of butcher paper several yards long divided into five sections, OR five pieces of chart paper (plus extra sheets in case the first ones are filled up). Sections of the butcher paper/pieces of chart paper labeled as follows: (a) girls, (b) parents, (c) poor children, (d) black boys, (e) [local community] schools
 - If chart paper is used it is most effective for teachers to sit in small groups of three or four. Each sheet of chart paper can then be moved from group to group
- Large post-it notes
- Markers

Lesson Outline for Graffiti Wall

LAUNCH.

- We are going to:
 - develop a graffiti wall that identifies the language they have heard used about particular groups of students and their parents from marginalized or non-dominant groups talked about in their school setting

EXPLORE.

- Teachers write things they have heard about particular groups of students and their parents from marginalized or non-dominant group on the butcher paper/chart paper using large post-it notes, focusing on one category after another in turn.
- The facilitator leads a discussion about the deficit language that has emerged during the brainstorming
 - Present to teachers the idea that the media, the teachers' lunchroom, society at large are rife with deficit descriptions of children, homes, families, schools, and communities, particularly about students and their parents from marginalized or non-dominant groups.
 - Share that you have heard this language many times in your experience working in school settings as they have too.
- During the discussion, teachers are asked to see if they notice common themes across categories. They are able to move their post-it notes from one category to another as they see appropriate or as they see themes emerge.
- Facilitator presents the idea that we want to counter that deficit thinking we hear by coming up with counter narratives.
- Teachers develop counter-narratives to address this deficit language.
- Teachers in each group assign roles to two or three members (person using deficit language, person presenting a counter-narrative, observer or person presenting an alternative counter-narrative) and role play a scenario of a teacher confronting the use of deficit language about a student, a parent, or the school.

SUMMARIZE.

- One group presents their scenario and other members of the large group respond
- Teachers consider:
 - What are ways to continue to engage in disruption and building counter narratives?
 - What might you read?
 - What might we talk about?
 - What might you look at in your schools/classrooms?

Facilitator Insights and Questions

- Because the use of deficit language is so pervasive in schools, it is sometimes difficult for teachers to differentiate between language and thinking that they might hear others use (and be critical of) and language that they themselves have or still use. Some may feel some discomfort during this activity.
- It may be useful during future PD sessions to revisit the idea of deficit language, particularly if the teachers continue to use deficit language themselves. It might be useful to revisit the pervasiveness of the use of this language in the media in general and in school settings in particular as it is so ubiquitous.

Additional Resources

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References

- *Aguirre, J. M. (2018) Math strong: reframing deficit discourse to asset-based discourse in mathematics education. Manuscript in preparation.
- *Aguirre, Julia. (2018, March). Math Strong: Actualizing our commitment to a more just and humanizing mathematics education. Keynote Address at the Teacher Development Group Leadership Seminar: Portland, OR.