Advancing Inclusivity by Caucusing


WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?
This article discusses the authors’ experiences successfully implementing racial identity-based caucusing in an MSW program social justice class at a large public university. Students asked to engage in racial identity-based caucusing due to friction in the classroom related to differential experiences and a lack of understanding of racism and white privilege.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?
Racial identity-based caucusing allows participants to discuss oppression and racism within their self-identified racial/ethnic group (people of color or white). A third-space caucus provides a group for participants whose experiences of racial identity fall outside of or in-between this binary. To facilitate the caucuses, class instructors:
• Offered three caucus groups: (1) people of color; (2) white; and (3) third space
• Brought in facilitators who identified with the members of a caucus to lead that caucus
• Held each caucus in a separate room to talk about identity and race-specific issues
• Established ground rules set by caucus members and provided structured questions to guide conversation
• Reconvened as a class, with established goals and parameters in place, to apply progress or breakthroughs made in caucuses to the larger classroom process and institutional setting

Caucusing outcomes:
- Increased the sense of accountability for complicity in a system of racial power and privilege by those who benefited from white privilege
- Established a supportive space for students who experience microaggressions to connect
- Resolved friction and helped students re-engage, allowing instructors to focus on course content
- Allowed students to trust that future conflict would be addressed, preventing disengagement and voicelessness people experience when they feel unheard or unsupported
- Provided a space to confront and examine conflict
- Increased the sense of accountability for complicity in a system of racial power and privilege by those who benefited from white privilege

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?
Child welfare organizations can also implement this approach to third-space caucusing to address privilege and differential experiences and promote social justice. In addition to the outcomes above, third-space caucusing can benefit worker and leader well-being by:
• Allowing a more critical analysis of organizational and individual assumptions and values, especially related to race
• Providing a way to work through social identity-based conflict in the workplace
• Creating accountability and connection across all levels of the workforce