

Cultivating race-conscious conversations: Integrating video microanalysis in restorative circles in a diverse high school classroom

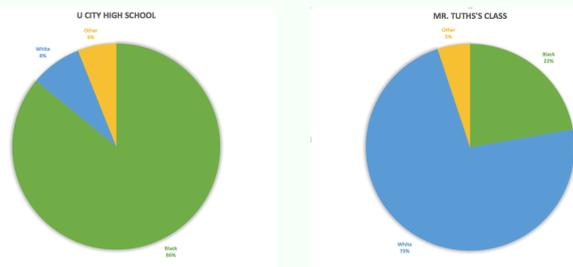
Olivia Marcucci, MSW & Rowhea Elmesky, PhD (Washington University in St. Louis); Matthew Tuths, MAT (University City High School)

Background

- What is **video microanalysis**?
 - A methodological tool for studying and valuing both unconscious and conscious aspects of interactions occurring in learning environments.
- What is **participatory research**?
 - Incorporating students, teachers and/or administrators as equal partners in the research process.

Study Context

- University City High School; St. Louis, MO
- Latin III class videoed in Fall 2016



Mr. Tuths's "Restorative Impulse"

"He just tells you you're wrong in a really nice way" [class laughs] –Student

- Much of the non-race related reflections in the three talking circles focused on Mr. Tuths's "restorative impulse" (Pranis, 2005). While the students did not use that language, they repeatedly emphasized his ability to build humanizing relationships with students and an engaged classroom community.
- His restorative impulse set the stage for students to communicate openly and honestly during the race-conscious conversation, even with some feelings of anxiety.
- Mr. Tuths has also been part of the school's Restorative Justice/ PBIS Committee for over a year.

Themes & Empirical Evidence

Setting up the circle

In restorative practices and participatory research, how you frame the conversation changes the tone and content. In this case, Dr. Elmesky used best practices to create the optimal environment for students to feel open to talking about race.

Circle keeper draws explicit connections to restorative practices: *"This role of student-researchers...matches really well with this idea of being in a talking circle--we really want to get at having honest discussions."* -Researcher

Uses common talking circle ground rules: *"We want you to talk from the heart, listen from the heart"* –Researcher

Positions students as experts of their classroom and their school: *"Help us understand what's happening in your class and how to make sure it's the best learning environment possible."* -Researcher

Emphasizes the real-world impact of this student-researcher talking circle: *"I don't want you to think about this [circle] as just your classroom because what we learn from you...will extend to other classrooms at UCity...but [also] beyond UCity there are other schools that are trying to learn how to make the environment a better place."* -Researcher



Picture, left: First day of student-researcher talking circles. Students watch short video clips then reflect. Students are seated in a circle, though focus on the projector when the videos are playing.



Picture, right: Third day of student-researcher talking circles. Students begin discussing race in their classroom after prompted by the circle keeper.

Discussing racial dynamics in circle

- Discussing race was either student-initiated or researcher-initiated.
 - In the first two days, two students made two discrete comments on the topic of race. Students used racially-coded language during the student-initiated moments.
 - On the third day, the researcher used an organic moment in the circle to explicitly address the racial demographics of the class. This researcher-initiated prompt started an hour-long discussion about race.
- After the initial researcher prompt, ten students immediately passed the talking piece. The first student to talk was an African American male who said *"What? Y'all scared?"*
 - After that student broke the ice, an energetic, hour-long conversation flowed.
- Students did not explicitly reference video clips during when the discussion turned to race, but did bring up specific jokes or interactions.

Conclusions & Recommendations

For Researchers

- Utilize a 'restorative impulse' in your interaction with stakeholders and research participants.

- The restorative philosophy is an inherently humanizing one and can be used to decolonize participatory research.

- Future research of this particular focus group will investigate paraverbal and nonverbal communication for indications of interactional success, as defined by Collins' (2004) Interaction Ritual Chains.

For Practitioners

- Wait for the right moment. Yes, race came up organically from two students but that doesn't mean the whole class was ready to engage in this courageous conversation. The circle keeper waited until the third consecutive day of showing video clips to students to explicitly bring up the topic of race.

- Leave space for awkwardness/silence (reiterate that passing the talking piece is allowed)

- Strategically move back and forth between sequential and non-sequential rounds

References

- Collins, R. (2004). *Interaction ritual chains*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Pranis, K. (2005). *The little book of circle processes: A new/old approach to peacemaking*. New York, NY: Good Books.

Contact Information

Olivia Marcucci: omarcucci@wustl.edu