FAKEQUITY

Fakequity=Fake Equity. Fakequity is bad. It shows up as all talk and no action.

Color Brave Space — How to run a better equity focused meeting

May 26, 2017July 10, 2018
Today is the start of Ramadan; Ramadan Mubarak to many of our partners.

This blog post has been a long time coming. We’ve punted this one back and forth for months. Someone will approach Heidi and say: “I really like your Color Brave Space. Can I get a copy and use it?” She’ll say: “Go ask Erin to blog about it.” Or someone will come to the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition meeting and say: “I really like the Color Brave Space table tents, can I take it?” and Erin says “No, no taking the table tents. Tell Heidi to blog about it since she’s the creator of Color Brave Space. And stop stealing my table tents — bad karma will come your way!” We’ll quit cross-referring and write the blog post.

Heidi has been conducting racial equity trainings for over a decade. In that time, she’s had groups come up with their own group norms, used ‘safe space’ agreements, and lots of other standard meeting practices. What she found was those types of meeting norms cater to whiteness. They allow the status quo to continue and don’t push people, both white people and people of color, to understand their roles in undoing racism and challenging long held beliefs. Erin attends a lot of meetings with standard group norms and often sighs and wishes she could refocus the group with the Color Brave Space.

There are elements of ‘safe space’ agreements that we agree with such as ‘respect’ and ‘confidentiality.’ However, too often safe space translates into too comfortable for white people and they take safe to mean, ‘don’t threaten my ways of thinking’ or don’t make me feel uncomfortable. Safety and comfort are the norm for white people, but you can’t be safe and comfortable to learn and grow.

Racial equity work should make us all think and challenge us to think and accept new information. Racial equity work is also about changing systems and centering the experiences and voices of people and communities of color. The Color Brave Space format when used correctly creates a different norms which allows this to happen more easily and readily.
To help you understand the elements/principles we will go a little more in-depth into a few of them.

**Put Relationships First** – Work to build community and trust with an awareness of power dynamics.

This is about trust building, connecting on a personal level, and helping us humanize each other, especially during conversations that are deeply personal, uncomfortable, and fraught with racialized mistrust. We also remind people trust is built over time so the meeting or training you are in is only the start and people should do the harder work of connecting outside of the meeting as well.

**Keep Focused on Our Common Goal** – We care deeply about [insert your mission], especially those who are directly impacted by racism. [This line can be your mission instead of filling in the blank.]

Heidi almost always emphasizes this principle, because this is why we are all here. You can personalize it to your organization’s mission or goal. It is important for everyone, even the facilitator to know that you are all there in pursuit of a common goal. When sharing it remind people we are all on the same team. Racial equity work is about reaching the common goal, not a ‘gotcha’ or ‘you’re a bad person’ sort of thing, it is about the work and getting to a common equitable outcomes.

**Notice Power Dynamics in the Room** – Be aware of how you use your privilege: From taking up too much emotional and airtime space, or disengaging.

We emphasize this one because power shows up in many different ways that people may not be conscious of. There are the obvious forms of power, who talks a lot, who uses their title, or when Erin facilitates she say “I am standing in the front of the room and speaking, I have a lot of power in this moment.” Power isn’t always bad, but it needs to be acknowledged and kept in check.
Some of the ways power shows up that are less obvious are things like who disengages or focuses all of the attention on them when things get uncomfortable. This person is the one who maybe keeps leaving the room to take a call, or picks up their phone and plays with it during the middle of the meeting, or argues or tells long personal stories to defend their ways of thinking. These are forms of using power which doesn’t advance the group agenda.

The best example of an unrecognized power is most of the time in dominant society (white) spaces, we are literally using ‘academic English’ as the tool or language of power. So if English is your first and primary language you will be able to participate quicker, more comfortably, and with deeper nuance. As an example, we have the Color Brave Space translated into Spanish. Erin once had a native Spanish speaker in an otherwise all English speaking room, read the Color Brave Space in Spanish. English only speakers looked uncomfortable because all of a sudden couldn’t understand what was happening though the written English translation was provided. It was a great reminder about the power of language.

Create Spaces for Multiple Truths and Norms – Speak your truth, and seek understanding of truths that differ from yours, with awareness of power dynamics.

A couple weeks ago, Erin signed me (Heidi) up for a meditation class. I’m not sure what she was trying to tell me, but I went despite knowing that I had a preconceived opinion that I don’t really like to meditate. But since Erin signed me up, I tried to stay open. Honestly, it was a struggle. But I am glad I went. I appreciated the instructor shared a Buddhist perspective about working hard to be in a “middle place.” Our brains are wired to be constantly judging (you’ve probably already decided if you like this blog piece or not, I guess if you’re still reading, you must like it), but the key is to use our conscious mind to not just fall directly into your immediate judgement and stay open to the ‘middle place.’ As a side note, I am still not sold on meditating, but willing to stay open to working on the practice. Erin’s note to Heidi: meditation like racial equity work takes practice, if you try meditation again you might resist it less, or we can try to meditate during happy hour.

When Erin facilitates she often reminds people that this shows up when people want to pit policies against people’s lived experiences. Sometimes when things get heated a person with formal power/authority may dismiss another person’s story by saying “Well, the policy says this so that couldn’t have happened,” or “I need evidence…” We need to consciously create space to allow people to share different perspectives and work to figure out the systems creating the discrepancies.

Be Kind and Brave – Remember relationships first, and work to be explicit with your language about race, class, gender, immigration, etc.

One of the greatest disservices we have done to conversations about systemic racism is use coded and ambiguous language like ‘diversity, culture, inclusion, or equity.’

Be clear in your language — when you say equity are you talking about racial equity or gender equity? This vague language actually prevents us from having an effective conversation. So let’s work to be specific with our language, and ask for clarification from others when we hear them use terms like diversity, culture, or equity. Along with being kind and brave, remember we need to build relationships for the long haul so use your language in ways that builds bridges.

Practice Examining Racially Biased Systems and Processes – Individual actions are important, and systems are what are left after all the people in this room leave.
Most of these processes and systems in place are ones we’ve inherited. They existed before us, and will continue to exist after we are all gone if we don’t examine and redesign them. It is important to remember we need to work at a systems level, so while the work may feel personal it isn’t about you it is about undoing institutional and systemic racism.

**Look for Learning** – Show what you’re learning, not what you already know. Avoid playing devil’s advocate, the devil has enough advocates.

Educators call this having a growth mindset. We all continue to have to continue to learn about dismantling racist systems. The best way to create a learning community is to show what we are learning, not what we already know. Heidi asks people explicitly not to play devil’s advocate; this is a use of power to control the conversation. If you really are thinking of an unpopular idea that you should be able to say what is on your mind, while also being open to others sharing counter-narratives. If you want to play devil’s advocate or argue, the meeting/training isn’t the place to do it, doing so is hoarding power. Instead, take Heidi out for a beer, but no PBR, just the good stuff. Erin will warn you though if you try to play devil’s advocate with Heidi you are likely to lose, she’s good I have yet to win an argument, unless it is about something like food.

Here are suggestions for using the Color Brave Space Principles (Elements) –

1. Post them, share them, and take the time to actually read through them (slow down to hear them) - They are meant to help us visualize the type of space we want to create together, so they aren’t helpful if you don’t actually take the time to acknowledge and emphasize them. We often ask the group to popcorn style read them (one bold statement with the italic sentence below) until we hear them all. This way folks are actually paying attention and hearing different people’s voices.
2. Pick a few to dig into and give some specific examples of what you want participants to be aware of. See deeper explanations above. I encourage you to add your own personalization and stories.
3. Highlight certain ones throughout the workshop that you want to emphasize for a specific exercise or conversation.
4. Hold your group accountable to the principles/elements. This means sometimes stopping a conversation and explaining why; see some of the examples above.
5. Please do not alter them or adapt them in any way.
6. One final ask, please credit Equity Matters when you use them.

Let us know how you’ve used them. Share how they impacted your meetings.

Finally, we must acknowledge and thank Mellody Hobson who introduced the concept of being color brave in her TED Talk (https://www.ted.com/talks/mellody_hobson_color_blind_or_color_brave). Give the TED talk a watch, then listen to it again for deeper meaning.

We are sharing the Color Brave Space format for personal use only. It shouldn’t be used for institutional or corporate use. If you want to license it to use at your organization please contact fakequity@gmail.com to buy a license to use it, licensing prices are below. Personal use means you are using it for a meeting you are facilitating, no additional copies are made. Institutional use is to share with more than one copy. Please respect these guidelines, we are sharing it in good faith and don’t want to have to pull this post because people are inappropriately using Color Brave Space.

We have Color Brave Space table tents available in PDF format in English and Spanish, other translations may come in the future. The PDF is available for a small donation of $11 generic version as it is in the image or $25 custom (your mission inserted) to Southeast Seattle Education Coalition (http://www.sesecwa.org/donate/) or a gift
2017-2018 Licensing Price Guide

Below is the 2017-2018 licensing price guide. Equity Matters (http://www.equitymattersnw.com/) (Fakequity’s sister organization and author of the Color Brave Space Norms) reserves the right to change these prices at any time. Equity Matters will donate the profits to poc led and embedded non-profits and causes. Please allow a minimum of two-weeks for the purchasing of a license.

- Individual educators, single-use license, copies of the PDF cannot be shared. Students may print out this blog post for individual copies — $11
- Schools — $500
- Nonprofits PoC led and embedded — $500, Mainstream Nonprofits (white led or poc led but not embedded) — $1,000
- Government agencies or departments (limited to one department) and School Districts (limited to central office/headquarters) — $2,000
- Consultants $500 to $1,000 — In the spirit of “equal is not equitable,” we’d encourage our White Ally/Accomplice Consultants to pay $1,000, but $500 is the minimum.

By Heidi Schillinger and Erin Okuno

Posted in: Uncategorized

6 thoughts on “Color Brave Space — How to run a better equity focused meeting”

1. JESSIE says: May 31, 2017 at 8:07 am
   Love this – is there a higher resolution image of the guidelines available?
   - FAKEQUITY says: May 31, 2017 at 1:50 pm
   Hi Jessie,

   We are offering a PDF table tent for a donation to the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition or gift (no tax deduction) to fakequity. Email fakequity@gmail.com for details about how to get a PDF.
   Thanks for reading the blog.

2. Pingback: How to Run an Equity Centered Conference – FAKEQUITY
3. Pingback: Talking About Race without Talking About Power is Useless – FAKEQUITY
4. Pingback: A very short look at anxiety – FAKEQUITY
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