

Get Racist Teachers out of the Classroom

By Shawnta S. Barnes – March 9, 2018



Recently, the racist behavior of two Florida teachers was exposed. Social Studies teacher Dayanna Volitich, who was using the pseudonym ‘Tiana Dalichov’ online was secretly hosting a white nationalist podcast “Unapologetic.” Math teacher David Swinyar used the n-word and said to his students, “You all should not be dating all these African American boys because they aren’t worth it.” Volitich was removed from the classroom, but Swinyar only received a 10-day unpaid suspension.

Some of my colleagues were shocked by these news stories. They couldn’t comprehend a racist person would teach children of racial backgrounds they

believe are inferior to the white race. I had as much shock about racist teachers being part of the profession as I did about Trump becoming President of the United States. Hatred and racism permeate all sectors of our society and racist beliefs about certain groups propelled Trump to the White House. With social media providing platforms for people to express their views, racist behavior is more easily brought to light.

Many people of color I know have a story about a teacher they felt either was a blatant racist or seemed to treat kids of color differently than white students. Even with culturally responsive training happening in districts across the nation, racism is still present in the classroom. Earlier this year, I was in a two-day racial equity training. During the training, there were times when the facilitators would do a check-in and give everyone a chance to express him or herself. One person read an excerpt from Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and afterwards concluded the training was a waste of time, that Dr. King's dream is currently a reality today, and if certain groups people just worked hard enough and stop throwing out the race card, they would be able to achieve their goals in life.

My father's family ended up in Indianapolis because the Ku Klux Klan burned down my paternal great-grandparents home more than once. During the last occurrence, they left Cedartown, Georgia and didn't stop until they arrived in Indianapolis, Indiana. Guess what? People who had the same beliefs as the KKK back then procreated and passed their hatred down to their children. Those beliefs appear today under the white nationalist or the neo-nazi movement and some of those people also happen to be teachers.

A colleague asked me, "Do you think a person could overcome racism?" I always lean towards the optimist side. So yes, I believe it is possible. Although I have this belief, our children don't have time for racist teachers to change their mindset while they are in the classroom. When teachers have sex with students or physically assault them, we want them out of the classroom and we should demand the same for racist teachers. The damage they could do to our children could last a lifetime.

We don't have time for shock and amazement about these situations. We need to continue to expose racist teachers and get them away from all children, especially children of color, and fast.