

## A Tale of Two Paradigms

### Traditional

Charita is a seventh grader at Bethune Middle School. She started at the school in sixth grade when her family relocated from Florida to be near her grandmother. Charita has two strong ethnic influences in her life—her dad’s African American family and her mom’s Mexican family. At home, there is no conflict between the two and she loves both her grandmothers, especially their cooking. Nothing is better than sweet potato pie for dessert and Chilaquiles for breakfast or lunch.

At school, she tends to stay pretty much to herself, although there are a couple of African American girls who are friendly when they are not around their other friends. There are some Spanish speaking kids in her classes, but they are all from Puerto Rican families and her efforts to make friends with some of the girls have not been met with good results. In fact, early on a couple of girls while laughing asked her *how did you manage to get across the border?* Charita decided to ignore them and their question.

Today, however, they went a step too far, as she heard them whispering during lunch. They were daring each other to ask her a pointed question. She heard Sheree, a popular spirit club member ask, ***So what is she anyway – a “B” or not; we should ask her if her favorite food is fried chicken or burrito?***

This was just too much, and Charita grabbed Sheree by her hair and pushed her out of her chair. A teacher broke them up, and the girls standing near said that Charita attacked Sheree. The teacher wrote on the referral slip that Charita attacked another student and no provocation was clear.

Charita was sent to the principal’s office and the teacher delivered the referral slip to the secretary. Ms. Corbin, the principal was on a call, and when she got off the telephone, she told the secretary to call Charita’s parents and tell them to pick her up. Ms. Corbin paused briefly and said to Charita, ***you know that we do not tolerate fighting and violence here.*** When her dad arrived, Ms. Corbin met him in the outer office and told him that Charita had attacked another student and that since this was her first fight, she was only suspended for three days. Ms. Corbin gave Charita’s father a copy of the school discipline policies so that he could read for himself that the penalty for fighting was a three-day suspension for the first offense. With her head down, Charita followed her dad to their car.

### Restorative

Charita is a seventh grader at Bethune Middle School. She started at the school in sixth grade when her family relocated from Florida to be near her grandmother. Charita has two strong ethnic influences in her life—her dad’s African American family and her mom’s Mexican family. At home, there is no conflict between the two and she loves both her grandmothers, especially their cooking. Nothing is better than sweet potato pie for dessert and Chilaquiles for breakfast or lunch.

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During homeroom, the following morning, when the students assembled for a Check-in Circle, Charita wanted to raise the issue but she did not quite know how to phrase what she was feeling. When it was

her turn to speak in the circle, she did manage to contribute to ideas for positive behavior that **students should be friendly even to students that they don't know well.**

Charita was mortified during lunch a few days later when she believed that she heard the girls whispering about her during lunch. They were daring each other to ask her a pointed question. She heard Sheree, a popular spirit club member ask, **So what is she anyway – a “B” or not; we should ask her if her favorite food is fried chicken or burrito?**

This was just too much, and Charita grabbed Sheree by her hair and pushed her out of her seat. A teacher broke them up, and the girls standing near said that Charita attacked Sheree. The teacher pulled Charita to the side and asked **so what happened?** Charita burst into tears and could not find any words to explain the situation. The teacher sent Charita to the Care room with a referral slip that said simply—**provoked a fight with another girl, needs to calm down and explain herself.** After hearing Charita's story, the Care room teacher called Sheree to the room for an after-school restorative conversation, having the homeroom teacher and the referring teacher in the circle.

The fighting and girls' hurtful talk were treated as separate harms so both Charita and Sheree responded to Restorative Questions for the one who caused harm and the one who was harmed. They each gave similar answers to the questions **“what needs to happen to make things better and what needs to happen to make things right?”** To make things better, each of them apologized. Charita indicated that to make things right, she hoped that Sheree would be friendly. Sheree indicated that to make things right, she hoped that Charita would sit with her group to get to know them.