Discussing Race, Racism, and Current Events with Students and Staff

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Acknowledgements

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Resource

“That’s me!”

How many of you...
- Work primarily with students and their families?
- Work primarily as school administrators?
- Work primarily at the district level?
- Work primarily at the state level?
- Work in higher education?
- Are going to school to learn how to do one of these things?

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

A. Describe the importance of discussing important current events, such as race and racism, with students
B. Leverage existing systems and use practical strategies for increasing the skills and capacity of staff to engage in discussions
C. Adapt lesson planning materials for use in your organizations

Learning Objectives

Ground Rules

- Speak what is true to you
- Make no assumptions
- Get comfortable with discomfort
  - this is a safe space that may be uncomfortable at times
- Strive to remain curious during disagreements instead of defensive
- It's ok not to know, but it's not ok not to take steps to learn
- Recognize your own positionality and intersecting identities when listening and responding
- Hold yourself and other participants accountable for maintaining these rules

(Adapted from Singleton, 2015 and Howard & Williams, 2022)

Rate yourself

Rate your current COMFORT in having a discussion about race in your “classroom.”

5: I feel super comfortable
4: I feel ok, but not super comfortable
3: I am not uncomfortable, but worry I won’t do my best
2: I really struggle, it isn’t easy, and I struggle with the task
1: I would much rather avoid it than do it
Rate yourself

- Rate your current **CONFIDENCE** in having a discussion about race in your “classroom.”

  5: I feel super confident it will be productive and positive
  4: I think it will go well, but not super confident
  3: I think it could go either way
  2: I think it could go poorly
  1: I think it will go poorly

Ask the audience:

*Why do you think it is important to discuss race and racism in the classroom?*

Breakout Discussions

- Organize into small groups for discussions
  - Ideally, seek out:
    - Someone you have just met
    - Group diversity
- **Principles**
  - **Maximize physical safety**
    - Distance, masks, podding up
  - **Maximize emotional vulnerability**
    - Engage in the discussions
    - Distinguish between physical and emotional safety

Breakout Discussion #1

- **When did you first become aware of race?**
  - **How old were you?**
  - **What happened?**
Breakout Discussion #2

- Why do you think most educators avoid discussing race and racism in the classroom?
- What are some of the individual and systemic barriers and challenges?

Guiding Questions

- What does it mean to be able to ignore issues regarding race?
- What am I thinking about when deciding?
  - Will I have to deal with this?
  - Will I have to be uncomfortable?
  - What are my students thinking?

Ask the audience:
What would help increase your confidence in holding productive conversations?
A Systematic Approach to Successful Conversations

Embed this Work into Existing Systems

- Situate this work within an existing team
- Bring others in
- Critically examine systems already in place
- Partner with “interested parties”
  - Administrators
  - School boards
  - Families
  - Students

Guiding questions
- Who will do this work with you?
- Who is the next person you’ll invite?
- What do your supervisors need to know?
A Systematic Approach to Successful Conversations

Build Knowledge and Experience: Areas for Learning
- History of systemic racism in the U.S.
- Understanding bias
- Identity development
- Intersectionality
- Exploring privilege
- Cultural awareness
- Social justice

Build Knowledge and Experience: Activity
1. Get back into your groups
2. Select an area for learning (see handout and p. 15)
3. Review resources in the area and share with your group:
   - Up to 2 things you like
   - Up to 2 examples of things you learned
   - 1 question you have

Build Knowledge and Experience: Resources
- Center on PBIS equity page
  - [https://pbis.org/topics/equity](https://pbis.org/topics/equity)
- Great Lakes Equity Center
  - [https://greatlakesequity.org/](https://greatlakesequity.org/)
- Learning for Justice
  - [https://learningforjustice.org/](https://learningforjustice.org/)
- Racial Equity Tools
  - [https://www.racialequitytools.org/](https://www.racialequitytools.org/)

Build Knowledge and Experience
- Embed into Existing Systems
- Build Knowledge and Experience
Build Knowledge and Experience:
Breakout Discussion #3

- Think back to a situation when you were unfairly stereotyped.
  - What was the situation?
  - How did you feel?
  - How hard was it to think of one, and what does that mean?

Ask the audience:

Should we wait until we have developed expertise before holding these conversations?

A Systematic Approach to Successful Conversations

Create an Installation Plan

- Plan for supporting productive conversations
- Identify scope and sequence for discussing race with students
- Install a careful process for rollout
Create an Installation Plan

- Be sensitive to the current educational context and state legislation
  - Terms to consider including/excluding
  - Identify what exactly is prohibited

Guiding Principles

- We all believe that a student’s color should not *fate* him or her to negative outcomes
- Discussing equity and race is *uncomfortable*
- Creating discomfort without providing effective strategies for equity is not productive
- In discussing equity and taking steps, we will make mistakes

Guiding Principles

- We all believe that a student’s color should not *fate* him or her to negative outcomes
- *No race is inherently superior to another race*
- Discussing equity and race is *uncomfortable for all of us*
- Creating discomfort without providing effective strategies for equity is not productive
- In discussing equity and taking steps, we will make mistakes

Ask the audience:

*What barriers have you experienced in discussing race and inequities with your SEA and Local program teams?*

*What are your plans to address them?*
Create an Installation Plan

Guiding questions
- What resources do you already have?
- Could existing lesson plans be useful?

Create an Installation Plan: Sample Lesson Plans

Classroom Statement
- Primary
- Intermediate to Secondary

Skills for Difficult Discussions
- Intermediate to Secondary
- Staff

Discussing Experiences
- Intermediate to Secondary

Lesson Plan Activity: Agreements for Engaging in Challenging Conversations

- Experience discomfort
- Speak what is true to you
- Expect and accept non-closure
- Accept that mistakes will be made

Create an Installation Plan: Group Agreements

- Either within or in addition to schoolwide teaching matrix

Sample set
- Experience discomfort
- Speak/express what is true to you
- Expect and accept non-closure
- Accept that mistakes will be made
Discussing Race and Racism Small Group Activity:
Skills for Conversations

- Examples
  - One Mic
    - One speaker at a time
  - Active Listening
    - Seek to understand before responding
  - “Ouch” and “Oops”
    - Protocol for disclosing and addressing harm
  - Pass
    - If you need more time or are still processing
  - I Statements
    - Speak for yourself and from your own experiences

A Systematic Approach to Successful Conversations

Implement and Monitor Progress

- Prepare for lesson delivery (including developing units & lesson plans- Appendix G)
- Avoid harmful ideologies (e.g. colorblind, all lives matter, deficit thinking)
- Be ready to respond to harmful comments (p. 28)
  - Neutralizing Routine
  - Timeout, free write, T-P-S (Dr. Lakeitha Morris)
- Reflect on lessons and their delivery
- Monitor outcomes

Implement and Monitor Progress: Breakout Discussion #4

- THINK, JOT, DISCUSS
  - What harmful comments might you expect to arise?
    - “I don’t understand Black Lives Matter. I think that it should be All Lives Matter. Why is that racist?”
  - What might be your first reaction?
  - What could be a planned response?
Create an Installation Plan: Skills for Conversations

- Examples
  - One Mic
    - One speaker at a time
  - Active Listening
    - Seek to understand before responding
  - "Ouch" and "Oops"
    - Protocol for disclosing and addressing harm
  - Pass
    - If you need more time or are still processing
  - "I Statements"
    - Speak for yourself and from your own experiences

Implement and Monitor Progress: Resources

- Resources from Learning for Justice
  - Speak Up at School
  - Let's Talk Guide

Implement and Monitor Progress: Activity

1. Organize into (new) elementary, secondary, and organization (i.e., adult teams) groups
2. Review the "difficult conversations" lesson plans (p. 34, 37)
3. Roleplay if desired
4. Discuss what changes you might make to make it more productive
   1. What went well?
   2. What could be improved?
   3. What's next?

Lesson Plan Activity: Discussing Race and Racism in the Classroom (p. 39-40)

- Objective
  - In small groups work through the lesson plan for intermediate to secondary students. Engage in the activity from your own perceptive and based off your own experiences.
  - Reflect on what this will be like when engaging in the conversation with students.
    - What pre-teaching is recommended
    - Anticipated challenges
Activity: The $64 Pyramid (Sara McDaniel)

1. Get into pairs
2. Sit across from each other, with Player 1’s back to screen
3. Round 1: Try to guess as many words as possible in 2 minutes
   - Player 2 is trying to get the Player 1 to guess words
   - Player 2 can’t use the term in definitions
   - Hint: see glossary on p. 61
4. Round 2: Switch sides and roles

Round 1
- Allyship
- Bias
- Colorism
- Culture
- Discrimination
- Dominant race or culture
- Equity
- Ethnicity
- Inequity
- Intersectionality

Round 2
- Marginalized group
- Microaggression
- Prejudice
- Privilege
- Race
- Social justice
- Stereotype
- Systemic racism
- Tone policing
- White supremacy
Rate yourself AGAIN

- Rate your current **comfort** in having a discussion about race in your “classroom.”

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- Rate your current **confidence** in having a discussion about race in your “classroom.”

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3: I think it could go either way  
2: I think it could go poorly  
1: I think it will go poorly

In Closing...

- If you’re waiting until the next event, it’s too late!

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Share one step you’ll take to move this work forward this year.
Q & A

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