

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

Kent McIntosh
Alexandria Robers

Acknowledgements

■ Land Acknowledgment

The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences and Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, through grants R324A170034 and H326S180001 to the University of Oregon. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

Acknowledgements



■ Guide for Discussing Race, Racism, and Important Current Events With Students

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Naomi Brahim | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruth Payno-Simmons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sarah Fairbanks Falcon | <input type="checkbox"/> Alexandria Robers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tamika La Salle | <input type="checkbox"/> Therese Sandomierski |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Milaney Levenson | <input type="checkbox"/> Maria Santiago-Rosario |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stephanie Martinez | <input type="checkbox"/> Kent Smith |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sara McDaniel | <input type="checkbox"/> Kimberly Yanek |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kent McIntosh | |

Resource

<https://www.pbis.org/resource/discussing-race-racism-and-important-current-events-with-students-a-guide-with-lesson-plans-and-resources>



“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?

Learning Objectives

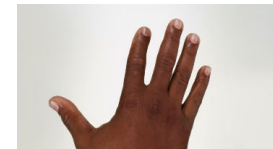
- By the end of this session, you should be able to:
 - A. Describe the importance of discussing important current events, such as race and racism, with students
 - B. Leverage existing systems and use practical strategies for increasing the skills and capacity of staff to engage in discussions
 - C.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

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



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

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

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?*

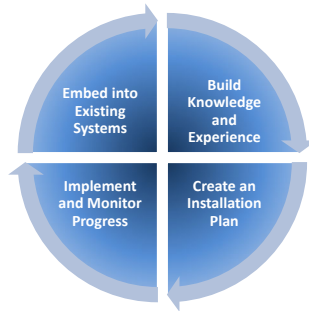


Guiding Questions

- 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



A Systematic Approach to Successful Conversations



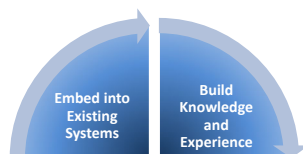
Embed this Work into Existing Systems

- 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

Embed this Work into Existing Systems

- 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

Things You Liked (2)	Examples (2)	Question (1)



Build Knowledge and Experience: Resources

- Center on PBIS equity page
 - <https://pbis.org/topics/equity>
- Great Lakes Equity Center
 - <https://greatlakesequity.org/>
- Learning for Justice
 - <https://learningforjustice.org>
- Racial Equity Tools
 - <https://www.racialequitytools.org/>



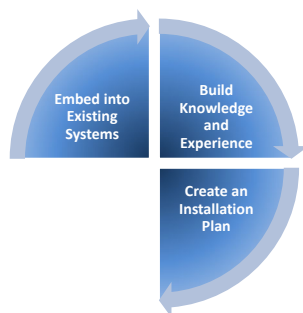
Build Knowledge and Experience: Breakout Discussion #3

- *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

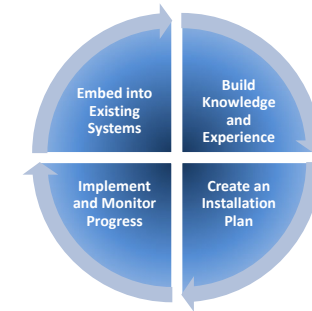
- Either within or in addition to schoolwide teaching matrix
- Sample set
 - Experience discomfort
 - Speak/express what is true to you
 - Expect and accept non-closure
 - Accept that mistakes will be made

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
 - https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/TT-Speak-Up-Guide_0.pdf
- Let’s Talk Guide
 - <https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/TT-Let-s-Talk-Publication-January-2020.pdf>



LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

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 perspective 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

Appendix E: Discussing Race and Racism Lesson Plan (Intermediate to Secondary Students)

The purpose of this lesson is to provide students with an initial opportunity to share their experiences and feelings and feel heard regarding race, racism, and current events. Additional purposes are to acknowledge potential trauma and provide space for student voice in the classroom.

Lesson Details

- **Participants:** Students in intermediate and secondary grades
- **Time:** 45 to 60 minutes
- **Preparation:** Make sure you have taught and practiced both class-wide behavior expectations and agreements and skills in having difficult classroom discussions (Appendix D). Complete work to prepare yourself for this lesson (see [Implement and Monitor Progress](#)).
- **Materials needed:** Posters of classroom matrix, agreements, and skills for difficult classroom conversations; Paper and writing utensils for a free-write activity.

Steps

1. **Revisit expectations for classroom behavior for whole group activities.** For example, say, "Who can give me an example of what it looks and sounds like to show respect when others are talking in the whole group, and why is it so important?" Provide both examples and non-examples.
2. **Introduce a purpose for the activity.** For example, say, "We are a community of learners. Some of our classroom discussions might be controversial for us, which provide an extra challenge. For these discussions, we will use some additional agreements and communication skills to keep the high levels of respect and care for each other that I know we can expect from each other."
3. **Revisit the agreements for engaging in challenging conversations taught in the previous lesson** (Appendix D), such as Experience Discomfort, Speak What is True to You, Expect and Accept Non-closure, and Make Mistakes. Ask students to provide definitions in their own words and examples and non-examples.
4. **Practice any previously taught communication skills** (Appendix D), such as One Mic, Pass, Ouch, and Thumb Check. Ask students to share examples and non-examples.
5. **Complete a free-write activity.** For example, say, "Please take the next 5 (or so) minutes to write for yourself your thoughts about or experiences with race and racism. These are for your reference. I will not be collecting them, so please write freely." Alternatively, you could collect these statements and read selected comments anonymously. Possible prompts (either for free-writing or discussion) include:
 - Please share what you are thinking or feeling right now about [recent event].
 - Write about a time when you were treated unfairly because of the way you looked. What happened, and how do you feel about it now?

6. **Hold a discussion.** Use your discussion norms (e.g., talking stick in a classroom circle) to invite students to share their experiences. Reaffirm that students should use their discussion skills (e.g., One Mic, Pass, Ouch). Make sure to model these skills for students. Use Ouch if you can perceive that a statement hurts students, but they don't say it themselves. Use thumbs checks as needed but do not enforce an expectation of consensus or closure. Allow students to speak and be open to where the conversation goes, even if it ends prematurely.
7. **Let students know are there for them.** For example, say, "I'd like to talk with any of you who would like to discuss more, share your feelings, or learn more about it after class or any time you'd like. I am here for you."
8. **End the session with positive feedback.** For example, say, "Thank you for being honest and engaged in this conversation. This is not easy, and I appreciate how you've treated each other in this discussion."

Following On

Consider what the next lesson or discussion should be (see [Appendix G](#)). Identify whether individual students may benefit from individual dialogue and support.

Alternatives

- Use a specific current event (e.g., a local or national incident of racism) as a concrete starting point for students to share their feelings in Step 5.
- Consider the use of virtual platforms for students to share their comments, but make sure to moderate comments instead of projecting them automatically.
- Consider forming small groups of students for initial discussions.
- Consider co-teaching this with other teachers or a coach who may be more confident in the work.

Tips

- Have a practiced response when students (or other adults) share statements that deny racism or other comments that need to be addressed publicly (e.g., to maintain a safe and respectful learning environment).
- Accept the fact that discussions can be helpful but will not solve all problems. There will likely be unknowns and uncertainty about how to move forward.
- Avoid statements like "I don't see color" or "All lives matter." Even if said from a caring perspective, these words can invalidate students' identities and be harmful.
- It can be helpful to acknowledge that you don't have all the answers but want to provide space to hear student voices. Sometimes the best thing we can do as teachers is listen to our students.

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.”

- 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 AGAIN



- 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

In Closing...

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



Share **one step you'll take** to move this work forward this year.

Q & A



Contact Information

- Kent McIntosh
Email: kentm@uoregon.edu
Twitter: [@_kentmc](https://twitter.com/_kentmc)
- Alexandria Robers
Email: muldr008@umn.edu
Twitter: [@ac_robbers](https://twitter.com/ac_robbers)

