Guiding Difficult Conversations about Race and Identity

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We ask...

1. How can teachers create a safe and supportive classroom space in which to discuss difficult issues?
2. How can teachers guide significant discussions on race and identity?

This workshop will include interactive and engaging activities to demonstrate ways to shift perceptions and help classroom teachers recognize their own identity and the relationship between the individual and society.
1. Welcome and Introductions
2. The Single Story and Stereotypes - Video and quilt activity
3. Collective Intelligent Resume
4. Identity signs activity
5. Identity and Agency
6. Critical conversations and strategies to enhance discussions.
“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
How do prevailing stereotypes affect the self-worth of individuals who are labeled by them?
Going beyond the single story...
Collective Intelligence
Resume

We have ___ years of teaching.
We have worked in ___ different schools.
We have these degrees.
We have these strengths.
Turn and Talk: What does your brain see?
The lion’s story will never be known as long as the hunter tells it.

“Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter.”

— African proverb

https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2015/hearing-the-lions-story
What if... 

...we create opportunities and remove barriers where every learner is encouraged to reach his or her dreams?
Identity Signs Activity - Goals

- To allow a space for people in the participant group to discuss their different salient identities and to understand, on a more interpersonal level, the experience of others.
- To demonstrate that even people who identify in the same way can experience different levels of self-consciousness around a particular identity.
- To talk about how we experience our identities on a day to day basis.
1. The part of my identity that I am most aware of on a daily basis is ________.
2. The part of my identity that I am the least aware of on a daily basis is ________.
3. The part of my identity that was most emphasized or important in my family growing up was ________.
4. The part of my identity that I wish I knew more about is ________.
5. The part of my identity that makes me feel discriminated against is ________.
6. The part of my identity that provides me the most privilege is ________.
7. The part of my identity that I believe is the most misunderstood by others is ________.
8. The part of my identity that I feel is difficult to discuss with others who identify differently is ________.
Social and Emotional Learning

- Integrated SEL
- Public Spirit
- Social Skills
- Cognitive Regulation
- Emotional Regulation
- Identity and Agency
Identity and Agency*

Strength Recognition

Self-confidence to try something new

Self-Efficacy, or belief in oneself

Growth mindset that is fueled by perseverance and grit

Resiliency to bounce back from setbacks
Difficult Conversations

“When we think of Implicit bias, we tend to get defensive because it’s about ourselves. It goes against our framework. In education, people are well intentioned and want to help children. How do we see so much disparity in a field with so many well-intentioned people?”  

Kelly Capatosto, Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity

American School Board Journal, October 2018
Not Light, But Fire by Matthew Kay

- How to recognize the difference between meaningful and inconsequential race conversations.
- How to build conversational “safe spaces,” not merely declare them.
- How to infuse race conversations with urgency and purpose.
- How to thrive in the face of unexpected challenges.
- How administrators might equip teachers to thoughtfully engage in these conversations. https://www.stenhouse.com/content/not-light-fire
Preparing Students for Difficult Conversations

Essential Questions

1. How can teachers and students create a safe and supportive classroom space in which to discuss difficult issues?
2. What are the different ways that people receive information about current events?
Building Relationships

“No significant learning can occur without a significant relationship.”
Dr. James P. Coomer
Language

THE POWER OF WORDS

REINFORCING
REMINDDING
REDIRECTING
Communicate and Self-Regulate

Reiterate: Restart what was heard
Contemplate: Count to 10 before responding
Respire: Take a breath and check in with yourself
Communicate: Speak with compassion and thoughtfulness

STEP 1 → STEP 2 → STEP 3 → STEP 4
Check In With Students

**SPOTLIGHT**

- **Green** = I am ready to go on.
- **Yellow** = I can go on, but I feel hesitant about moving forward.
- **Red** = I do not want to go on right now.

**FIST-TO-FIVE**

- **Fist** = I am very uncomfortable and cannot move on.
- **1 Finger** = I am uncomfortable and need some help before I can move on.
- **2 Fingers** = I am a little uncomfortable, but I want to try to move on.
- **3 Fingers** = I am not sure how I am feeling.
- **4 Fingers** = I am comfortable enough to move on.
- **5 Fingers** = I am ready to move on full steam ahead!
DEBRIEFING STRATEGIES

Talking Circles:
Gather in a circle and create, or review, the norms that will help build trust. Select a significant object as a talking piece that allows participants to engage equally in the discussion. Whoever holds the talking piece can speak, while the rest of the circle listens supportively. Pose a question or statement to begin. It can be as simple as “How do you feel about today’s lesson?” As the facilitator or circle keeper, you will participate as an equal member of the group. As students become familiar with the process, consider inviting them to be circle keepers.*

Journaling:
Personal reflection through writing can be extremely effective for debriefing after difficult conversations. Journaling helps students process their emotions on their own terms and at their own pace. Decide whether journals will be kept private or serve as a space for you to dialogue with students by writing back and forth.

Role Play with Puppets:
Students can communicate playfully and safely.

Drawing:
Personal reflection and emotional processing
Teaching Strategy: Contracting

1. Identify when you have felt comfortable sharing your ideas and questions in a class. What happened in those moments to help you feel comfortable?

2. Identify when you have had ideas or questions but have not shared them. Why not? What was happening at those moments?

Contracting Lesson
What if...

...we create opportunities and remove barriers where every learner is encouraged to reach his or her dreams?
THANK YOU

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Denton, R. Power of our words: Teacher language that help students learn. Center for Responsive Schools, Inc. 2013.

Facing History and Ourselves. Professional Development:

https://www.facinghistory.org/professional-development/ondemand/introduction-contracting

