



FACILITATING RACE CONVERSATIONS WITH STUDENTS

FACILITATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Understand the difference between a debate and a dialogue

A “debate” can amplify conflict while a “dialogue” can build understanding and trust. How we engage in these activities is dramatically different. Encourage students to identify the difference.



Educate Yourself

While we are in a learning process, it’s still important to educate ourselves before facilitating these conversations. Understanding and explaining problematic and harmful ideas like reverse racism, and colorblindness, as well as defining and identifying microaggressions, are among the competencies needed to begin having meaningful conversations about race.

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Be Open to Learn

When it comes to the student-teacher dynamic, teachers are typically experts. There is no need, however, to pretend to be an absolute authority on race and identity. In fact, students will be more receptive to you if you demonstrate that you are committed to learning about race and about facilitating difficult discussions. Race is a hugely complex topic and we're all learning. Be willing to tell students you're not sure about something, or to correct something previously said (or left unsaid) is critical. Embrace not having the answers and encourage students to do the same.



Assess & Acknowledge Your Bias

There are a lot of ways to go about exploring your own biases, one of which is through the Implicit Association Test (IAT) - a widely used and accepted bias assessment made by Harvard University and Project Implicit. <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

CREATE COMMUNITY IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Establish collaborative norms and community agreements for general conversation in the classroom, which are helpful when the subject matter becomes challenging. Here are some helpful guidelines.

- We wait until the speaker's finished instead of interrupting.

- We challenge the ideas, not the people talking about the ideas.

- We commit to learning from the conversation

- We use supportive language instead of insults.

- We respect "air time"; we contribute without dominating the discussion

- We honestly question each other instead of dismissing or demeaning each other.

- We listen carefully to each other.

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Have the Conversation

There are a lot of deterrents when it comes to facilitating difficult conversations, especially at school, and it's easy to think you're better off not having the conversation at all. There's the concern about parental response, administrator feedback, or creating controversy among students. When we're feeling apprehensive, we have to remember

- students are talking about race, and as educators we can support them in doing so in a safe space.
- your class may be the only place students participate in balanced, fair discussions
- avoiding conversations about race/not acknowledging race in your classroom can be deemed dismissive, especially to students of color

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Keep it Going

These conversations don't result in solving all of the world's race issues, but it creates a space for students to learn and discuss, which is essential. Engage in these discussions even when it's difficult. Instead of ending these conversations when they get tense (and they likely will), rely on the sense of community you established through the course of the school year to support students with disagreeing respectfully.

Have Patience

Employ the pregnant pause to give kids "think time". Big ideas and thoughts are being shared, which merit thoughtful consideration before replying. This will also help more pensive students have an opportunity to contribute to the discussion.



RESOURCES FOR FACILITATING DIFFICULT DISCUSSIONS

Ten Things Every White Teacher Should Know When Talking About Race

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/angela-watsons-truth-for-teachers/id954139712?i=1000382815630>

Let's Talk!

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/lets-talk>

How Should I Talk about Race in My Mostly White Classroom?

<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/how-should-i-talk-about-race-in-my-mostly-white-classroom>

RESOURCES FOR FACILITATING DIFFICULT DISCUSSIONS

Racial Justice in Education Resource Guide

<https://neaedjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Racial-Justice-in-Education.pdf>

How to Start Talking About Race in the Early Elementary Classroom

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-start-talking-about-race-early-elementary-classroom>

Fostering Civil Discourse A Guide For Classroom Conversations

https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/publications/Fostering_Civil_Discourse.pdf

Speak Up at School

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/speak-up-at-school>