Classroom Strategies for Talking about Race

Excerpted and adapted from Everyday Antiracism, edited by Mica Pollock

Learn
- Racial categories are not biological realities.
- Develop the will, skill, and capacity to engage in courageous conversations about race.

Remember
- We are all treated as racial group members and need to examine that experience. However, within racial groups, experiences will be different based on other identities.
- Students may have experienced unequal expectations based on their race. Educators need to work with student anxiety about unequal intelligence or potential.

Teach
- Basic skills! Defy racially based ideas of potential careers and contributions.
- Create curriculum that explores how people have been (and still are) treated differently or disadvantaged based on race or ethnicity.
- Analyze systematic racial barriers (such as over-policing, discrimination in hiring, etc.) and the impact over time of such practices.
- Find materials that teach the history and literature of diverse cultures. Show students their stories matter. Use readings and images of people who share your students’ background.
- Listen to your students. They are experts in their own experiences.

Navigate
- Notice and investigate students’ silences. Avoid putting students on the spot to represent their race or ethnicity.
- Directly discuss racially charged topics in a structured and safe format, such as:
  a) Create ground rules, such as not interrupting, active listening, allowing for pauses, and ensuring everyone gets a chance to talk.
  b) Elevate learning, growing, and connecting over being right.
  c) Model not responding to everything and instead just trying to understand. Show appreciation for where each person is at and each person’s struggle to be present.
  d) Provide time for evaluation so students can say what went well & what could go better.

Connect
- Analyze with coworkers and students how your race affects your teaching.
- Learn about your students’ home lives and communities.
- Find support so that you can keep thinking about everyday antiracist strategies.

Act
- Invite students to help define and debate the antiracist policies necessary for improving your school.
- Work together with others in your community and your school to change unequal systems.

FOR MORE TEACHING IDEAS AND SUPPORTS, SEE PP. 3, 40, 41, 42, AND <CHANGEAGENT.NELRC.ORG/ISSUES/ISSUE-42>.