Strategies for Talking about Race in the Classroom

Riva Pearson and Cynthia Peters

April 20, 2021



Welcome



Riva Pearson, ESOL teacher, Jewish Vocational Service, Hyde Park, <u>rpearson@jvs-boston.org</u>



Kamala Redd, teacher, Mid-Manhattan Learning Center, NYC



Cynthia Peters, *Change Agent* Editor, PD provider at World Education, <u>cpeters@worlded.org</u>



Maegan Morris, World Education, <u>mmorris@worlded.org</u>



Matias Rodriguez, former GED student at El Rio Learning Center, Tucson, AZ



Dalsaint Lavoir, ESOL student at JVS, Boston, MA



Ebony Vandross, World Education, evandross@worlded.org



Thank You for Joining Us Today!



Warm-Up

Who do you want to honor in this work? Who do you have in mind when you take on this work?



Agenda

- Introduction/Welcome
- Student reflection -- *Matias Rodriguez Video*
- Why address race in the classroom -- *Cynthia*
- What excites you/makes you nervous? -- Interactive
- Student Reflection -- *Dalsaint Lavoir Video*
- How to talk about race in class: overview -- *Riva*
- Share the Google slides -- "Field trip" Riva
- Resources

You Want Me to Do What?



Yes, We Can Talk about Race in the Classroom!

Race can be a hard topic, but it is important. When we talk about race, we might remember painful experiences. But we might also be inspired by people's courage. Talking about race helps us understand history and current events in the U.S. It helps us support our children and our communities. It helps us build community in the classroom. This ABE class at El Rio Learning Center in Tucson, AZ, studied race. Here is what students said about it:

Racism in History and Today

I first started to hear about race when I came to the U.S. It is hard to see our community and our people suffer because of race. Racism started a long time ago—with slavery and then segregation. Today, racism continues. I turn on the TV, and I hear about race all the time. I don't like what I hear. Everybody should have the same rights.

-- Alma Alicia Zepeda G.

Learn from History

It helps to talk about race so that we don't repeat the same mistakes from the past.

-- Mark Reynolds

It Is Frustrating

In class, I wrote about when my dad got pulled over by two white cops and they were giving him a hard time, I think, because of his tattoos and his skin color. There are people out there who are racist and people who aren't. Oh well, you can't change it. That's life. It frustrates me.

-- Natalie Roche

We Need to Teach Our Children

We need to teach our children to treat everyone the same. We want them to see everyone as an equal. In America, talking about race can be risky, but we should do it anyway so that we can all learn to fight racism.

-- Matias Rodriguez

We Can Do Something

It is important to talk about race at home and in school. If we share our opinions and feelings, we can do something about this problem. When I talk about race, I feel angry. Why can't people accept others? We are here sharing this planet. We could all live in peace like brothers and sisters.

-- Leticia Alvarez

Inspired to Focus on My Dreams

Talking about race is hard, but it is also inspiring. Black people experienced many abuses in their lives. But they were strong and fought for their rights. They joined forces. They were brave and they fought for their dreams. They inspire me to be strong and brave, and to focus on my dreams. -- Rosa Imelda Quintana

from p. 3 of the "Talking about Race" issue of The Change Agent.

Guest presentation: Matias Rodriguez

From 2016: Matias discusses reading this book in class and being in a small group with a white student who thought the book was a waste of time.

Full 2016 webinar here:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1 I1PBUTI8G_040Dgj2Hpmno2SPY KUC7q0/view



Comments from Matias...5 years later



https://youtu.be/AWwL_KgYvj8

Why talk about race and equity in the classroom? It builds community!

- When you take on something challenging, it's an opportunity for everyone to grow together.
- People might show themselves more.



Why talk about race and equity in the classroom? *It's relevant!*

- Relevance drives persistence.
- High-interest articles act as scaffolding toward more and more complex materials.



Why talk about race and equity in the classroom? It's the elephant in the room!

"The pandemic has exacerbated racial inequities. I always taught about racism, but now the process is even more organic. The elephant in the room is even bigger now."



-- Kamala Redd, teacher at Mid-Manhattan Learning Center, NYC

Why talk about race and equity in the classroom? It addresses obstacles!

- Bias (both explicit and implicit) gets in the way of learning.
- By addressing it (and treating it as something that can be wrestled with), we can change the learning environment *and* empower learners to reach their goals.



Why talk about race and equity in the classroom? It's inspiring!

Inspired to Focus on My Dreams

Talking about race is hard, but it is also inspiring. Black people experienced many abuses in their lives. But they were strong and fought for their rights. They joined forces. They were brave and they fought for their dreams. They inspire me to be strong and brave, and to focus on my dreams.

> -- Rosa Imelda Quintana El Rio Learning Center, Tucson, AZ



Why talk about race and equity in the classroom? "These conversations are not just negative."

"[I have had] foreign students who have found the America they encounter is one that is much improved, due to the multi-generational efforts of African-Americans, some of whom built protest movements, while others worked from within racist environments to agitate for change. These freedom fighters helped pave the way for the benefits available to newer immigrants."



-- Kamala Redd, NYC

Why talk about race and equity in the classroom? It teaches key skills!

 You can help students differentiate between fact and opinion. You can ask: Why do you think that? Do you have evidence for that? Let's research that.



Why talk about race and equity in the classroom? It teaches critical thinking!

In the classroom, I make it clear that we all have a right to our opinion. But we also have to be critical thinkers.

- I've had students ask, "Why do black people commit so much crime?" So we look at the system of over-policing and the imbalance in the criminal justice system. We take some time to work on media literacy. [We explore] inferior educational systems and exclusion from traditional paths of employment. Not to mention the destruction of black communities through underfunding, red-lining, imminent domain, welfare policies, infusions of drugs, the criminalization of addiction and more.
- I bite off pieces and share them like a mother bird but the informational nourishment is never comprehensive and often seems insufficient.



-- Kamala Redd, NYC

Why talk about race and equity in the classroom? It teaches civics standards!

Find the Mass. ELPS and more information here:

https://www.sabes.org/content/ma-elps-massachusetts-english-language-proficiency-standards-document-and-overview-videos

1. Recognize culturally-associated values, beliefs, symbols, and behaviors, as well as damaging cultural stereotypes.

2. [...] balance acculturation with preserving one's culture.

3. Identify one's human, legal, and civil rights and responsibilities and understand how to exercise them.

4. Communicate respectfully with others and [...] listen and hear one another.

5. Identify and analyze public problems, drawing on diverse sources to better understand a problem and its root causes.

6. Deliberate with others to address community issues, consider options for change, identify decision makers, take constructive action, reflect on outcomes, and recognize progress or setbacks.

7. Recognize the rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of living in an interconnected digital world, and participate in ways that are safe, legal, and ethical.

Why talk about race and equity in the classroom? It is an ethical choice -- but don't go it alone!

 In a society where bias is real and pervasive, choosing to address this in the classroom is an ethical choice... if you can, and if you are prepared and supported!







Building more authentic relationships	I'm excite continuin Civil Righ context of issues	g to teach ts in the	l'm excited to he identify the moti of our communit	vations	Knowing that change is possible in the long run		Learnin more	g Being a p of change		
I am excited at implementing ideas I learned my work.	some of the	key perspective s in history for me and my students	Being able to build community through relevance and connections	These conversat actually happening are cruca move forv Brava!	g! These il ways to			I'm excited about engaging with peers to talk about how to manage descent in the classroom and building a supportive community.		
Having an impact on positive community change	Doing something that is a small part of the solution	and voic affect re the abilit in my sp	ited that our action es are starting to al change. I have ty to make change pace and to plant th change in those present.	centeri	ng be t ma	r my tent to otter atch my pact		I am excited to do better and to use my voice to work with my colleagues in ELT to decentre		
I am just happy it is being addressed by so many		wn experiences d their opinions	think about materials wi devlopment	think about creating new materials with our professional devlopment team to address these issues and questions.				whiteness and engage with anti-racist pedaggoies.		

ARE YOU EXCITED ABOUT?										То	The				
Excited to learn more Student		a space for t voice		Knowing that change is possible in the long			Building community through authentic learning; making connections		ic	potentially effect change!	opportunity to be so much more relevant.				
I'm excited we are having these		ľ	'm excited	d			Giving learners chance to talk		Explorin history		•	Allow student to make positive			
conversations Being able to see my students		C n	that the conversatio ns are happening		Rich an complex convers		ons	about their experience this regard	r es in	People are becoming more comfortable talking	strengt and resistar	h	changes in their lives Students seeing		
relevance findin and into t			ooking forward to inding ways to get back nto the classroom so that can have these					g more tic 1ships	implen	about this about about all cited about all nenting some of learned today	f the		connection between education and justice		
that I can use in class.		conversations.					my wor		rk.		I Had a presentation about Black History month. I want to make				
I am excited of what my students will have to offer to enrich the conversation and the learning			Teaching diverse students, having conversations about differences			l a t	Excited that have an opportunity o be a part of this work		I'm excited to different our will hopefully years	society	it better and not do it just in February.				

Interview with Dalsaint Lavoir



https://youtu.be/xxwhHK7t8Yg

In the chat...

- Reflect on what you struck you about this interview.
- . What felt important?
- . What questions do you have?
- How does this interview help you think about your own students?

How to talk about race and equity in the classroom

I'm not a teacher expert. I'm a teacher guide. I'm a person who likes to learn, and so I can impart that excitement. My approach is, "We're going to learn this together."



-- Kamala Redd, teacher at Mid-Manhattan Learning Center, NYC

How to talk about race and equity in the classroom Build community and trust in the class.



- Give students a chance to get to know each other outside of hard conversations.
- Have the students set ground rules for speaking respectfully about hard topics.
- Invite students to talk about their experiences.
- Don't respond to everything. Let students respond to each other.
- Throw questions back at them rather than answering yourself.

How to talk about race and equity in the classroom Think of it as survival and everyday English.

Issues of race and equity are just as important for survival in the U.S. as being able to go to the grocery store or open a bank account.

Talking to the Traffic Police

Everyday Dialogues

In this lesson, you will learn useful vocabulary and expressions related to traffic violations. You will practice being a traffic officer and a driver.

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

- 1. What does a traffic police officer do?
- 2. What are some situations where a driver would have to talk with the traffic police?
- 3. Have you ever been pulled over by a police officer? Describe your experience.

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match the words on the left to the correct meanings on the right.

How to talk about race and equity in the classroom Remember that it is everyday English.

- Fingerprinted
- Up to no good
- Humiliation
- Border
- Speak up
- Raise our voices
- Allegedly
- Discriminate

- Hoodie
- Acquitted
- Warrant
- Cooperate
- Racial profiling
- Institutional
- Cuffs
- Unite

How to talk about race and equity in the classroom Connect to what you already do. Make small changes so you don't overwhelm yourself.



Black Lives Do Matter

Jeff Cunningham

In this essay, I'm going to explain why I think the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is a good thing. It keeps the police in check and reminds them they are not above the law. I also think there needs to be a voice out there to stand up for those who have been wrongfully murdered by the police. Lastly, I think the BLM movement might, like other mass movements in the past, have enough power to change things for the better.

Police Accountability

The police have always seemed to me like they think they are above the law. And I am not the only one who thinks this. A USA Today poll found that "Americans by 2-to-1 say police departments don't do a good job in holding officers accountable for misconduct." A researcher quoted in the Wall Street Journal backs up this perception. He says, "It's very rare that an officer gets charged with a homicide offense resulting from their on-duty conduct even though people are killed on a fairly regular basis."² As everyday citizens, we don't have much control; that's why we need movements like Black Lives Matter. The police will always think



they are all powerful until we stand up together and demand that they be held accountable.

Many Voices More Powerful than One

One person's voice usually doesn't hold much weight, but when people unite many voices into one, they have more power. For example, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where police have a history of killing unarmed victims, people in the commu-

Black Lives Matter vs. All Lives Matter

Why does the Black Lives Matter movement emphasize *black* lives instead of *all* lives? Because, according to their website, "When Black people get free, everybody gets free. #BlackLivesMatter doesn't mean your life isn't important-it means that Black lives, which are seen as without value within White supremacy, are important to your liberation... This is why we call on Black people and our allies to take up the call that Black lives matter. We're not saying Black lives are more important than other lives, or that other lives are not criminalized and oppressed in various ways. We remain in active solidarity with all oppressed people who are fighting for their liberation and we know that our destinies are intertwined."

- from <blacklivesmatter.com>



How to talk about race and equity in the classroom Make room for students to talk about hard things that is appropriate to their language level.

How are you feeling today?

How does {*the reading*} make you feel?

How do you feel when you see this picture?

How do you think she feels?



How to talk about race and equity in the classroom *Provide context for what your students might be experiencing.*

- Incorporate issues of race and equity into your everyday teaching. Don't wait until something comes up.
- Don't just talk about negatives. Also incorporate stories of fun, celebration, beauty, etc.



"Juneteenth at Oak Bluffs" by Sonia Sadler. Used with permission from Inez Sadler

How to talk about race and equity in the classroom addressing racism vs. talking about racism



- Addressing race and equity in the classroom can be implicit rather than explicit.
- Make choices about
 what to teach and
 how to teach it based
 on who YOUR
 students are and
 where they come
 from.

How to talk about race and equity in the classroom Speak from your own experience, and use resources that speak to theirs.

"I eventually got a job in a dry-cleaner's where they paid me in cash because I didn't have a Social Security number. I used to work many hours and stress myself to the point that one day I passed out. I always got paid less than everybody else because my boss thought I didn't have the right to say anything...Now I am trying to get my GED. I have amazing teachers who are helping me achieve my goal. Everyone should be able to have a career regardless of their immigration status."

-- Patricia Vazquez, "I am a DREAMer" Change Agent: Immigration

Diverse voices Diverse topics Diverse formats

Water Treatment is Essential Work

Two Adult Education Students Discuss the Program that Led to a Good (and Essential) Job

Garry Johnson Interviews Tom Connelly



Garry Johnson is a hardworking individual and wants to help others do well so those he helped can go on to help others. He is also a student at X-Cel in Boston, MA.



Tom Connelly works as a wastewater operator. He is a graduate of X-Cel Conservation Corps in Boston, MA. He is also a musician.

I Miss My Mother

Bob L. Occeus

BEFORE YOU READ: The pandemic has separated us from many of our loved ones. Whom do you miss?

Before the pandemic, I visited my mother twice a week. She is old and sick. Our visits were important to both of us. When we met, she always asked me a lot of questions. She asked about my work, my school, and my plans for the next week. She also gave me advice. For example, she told me what attitude I should have in this country to avoid trouble with police and others. Sometimes she surprised me by making good food from our country, and we ate together.



Bob L Occeus was born in Haiti in 1976 He has three kids. He was a police inspector in Haiti. He is now a student at the JVS Hyde Park ESOL program in Boston, MA. His goal is to learn new things and start a new life in the USA.

Now, I can't see my mother. She lives only four miles away. But I can't see her because I don't want her to get

sick. I am scared to lose her, like a lot of friends lost their mothers. I feel stressed about

away her clothes, and

gine some of the best we can feel close to nt to see my mom,

not seeing her for a long time. And I feel sad because I am not there to help her with

Breathe! Sorting through the Advice

Vidhya Palanimuthu

BEFORE YOU READ: When you are having emotional struggles, do you find people's advice helpful? Explain.

People Give Advice

We often find people around us saying, "Relax, you will be fine." But is it that easy? If yes, then why do people need assistance and support to "treat" stress? It's absolutely not easy. I find it to be tremendously tough. It's not easy to make people understand what is going on in your mind when you don't understand it yourself. Sometimes, our minds can feel completely chaotic.

When I was struggling emotionally, a few friends offered real support, and a few others sounded more like they were quoting something from a Google search:

"Dance it out." But I was falling.

"Go for a walk." But my legs were frozen. "Talk about it." But I was tongue-tied. "Go to bed early." But I was tossing and turning. "Focus." With a confused mind?



Vidhya Palanimuthu is from India and has been living in Kee for the last six years. She is a busy mom of a 3rd grader and grader, and she loves being a mom. She takes some time ou herself to attend Keene Community Education. It's a great p to learn and socialize with the best teachers and awesome f students. She also enjoys drawing, painting, and music.

revisit some of my childhood hobbies like pa ing. I found I could wipe away the blues wit happy colors. Trust me: colors can do magic I tried reading with no barriers or judgemen read magazines, cookbooks, online articles, kids' comics.

I also turned to my family. They were n greatest support. We cooked together, playe gether, and shared childhood stories. Somet a good long hug is the best medicine. We ne

Endorphins – A Natural Remedy

Tyese Dowe

BEFORE YOU READ: Read about endorphins in the box below. Have you ever experienced a "high" from endorphins?

When it comes to mental health, going to the gym is my heaven. When the pandemic hit, I couldn't go to the gym anymore, so I started going for walks. I walked fast to get my heart pumping and my body sweating. I also played sports with my son in the park, which made my heart smile.

When you exercise, your body releases a chemical called endorphins. Endorphins send a message through your nervous system that results in a great mood. They make you feel like you're a kid again. They make you feel energized. When I exercise and I'm listening to Jennifer Lopez or Beyonce, I start my personal party. After I work out, my heart and mind feel much lighter-which is so helpful during this difficult time. Endorphins can also help relieve pain and stress.

I encourage everyone to start walking. Just start with a block or two and take it from there. If you do a little bit at a time, you will see progress,

and you can enjoy this awesome feeling of relaxation.

My love of exercising came from being a dancer in my younger years. Dance class gave me a hard workout and this is how I experienced heaven. I noticed that afterwards, I had

more energy, not less! I have used this energy to explore my creative side. I've painted and drawn a lot of masterpieces. I've also become a better and more creative cook.

I'm not too sure if things are ever going back to normal. Even if the gyms are open, safety Grand There are allow a days



wrong, it is barely nothe rule:

"Who misses me?

n do vou miss? I miss

m, him, or her, then use **Nrite questions using**

Two Audio Articles about Hair:

"Mine was the Most Kinky"

https://changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-46-marc h-2018-hair/mine-was-the-most-kinky/

Note: this one has picture story version running along bottom of page.

"Some Fiiiiine Hair"

https://changeagent.nelrc.org/wp-content/ uploads/2018/03/Some-Fiiiiine-Hair.m4a

Note: this audio is a little different from most of our audio; it is read by the author herself!





Here are four Google slide presentations that address race

- 1. Black Lives Matter high intermediate ESOL
- 2. Talking to the Police high intermediate ESOL
- 3. Intro. to Racism in the U.S. high intermediate ESOL
- 4. Equality vs. Equity can be adapted for various levels

Instructions: Riva will show you around the BLM one. Then take **5** minutes to explore that one or any of the other three. Note something that stand out and bring that observation back.

All slideshows are located here:

https://changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets/

Hope to see you for the last webinar

- 1. April 13 Implicit Bias
- 2. April 20 Classroom Materials and Practices (with Riva Pearson)
- 3. April 27 Programs and the Field (with Carmine Stewart)

Remember: Check out this interactive space where we have collected some best practices, and where you can share your own experience. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mnsTxTZc3rHo9K1kik49ghnBx3 s7HW4trtiXGBoqRUY/edit?pli=1

Questions/comments? Contact me at Cynthia Peters, <u>cynthia_peters@worlded.org</u>

Handouts

 Lesson Packet 12 – "Facing Racism" – content and strategies for talking about race in the adult ed classroom.

<u>https://changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets/#</u> packet12

- Lesson Packet 17 "Indigenous People's Issue (Level 4 Adaptations)" – 5 articles by and about indigenous peoples. <u>https://changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets/#</u> <u>packet17</u>
- "Talking about Race" this issue of *The Change Agent* is free this year. Go to <u>https://changeagent.nelrc.org/</u>, fill out the form, and receive a PDF of the magazine, all the audio, and all the extras!

Resources

Best Practices for Talking about Race in the Classroom -https://changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets/#packet12

The Change Agent – students tell stories of taking action in micro and macro ways in school, family, community, and workplace. <u>https://changeagent.nelrc.org/</u>

EdTech Center – <u>https://edtech.worlded.org/</u>

NCTN – College Success for Single Mothers. <u>https://www.collegetransition.org/career-pathways/featured-projects/single-mothers-success/</u>

NELRC: resources for civic engagement -- <u>https://nelrc.org/resources/#civic</u>

"Literacy and Justice" – blog by Ira Yankwitt from the Literacy Assistance Center, with link to Google doc of teaching resources: <u>https://www.lacnyc.org/lit-and-just-message.html</u>

COABE Student Ambassador training – <u>https://coabe.org/student-ambassador/</u>

ProLiteracy Advocacy Toolkit – <u>https://www.proliteracy.org/What-We-Do/Advocacy</u>

"Racial Equity," COABE Journal -- <u>https://coabe.org/coabe-journal/</u>

Questions/Comments/Want to pursue this work in your program or region? Contact us at:

Cynthia Peters

Change Agent editor, PD provider at World Education, former teacher

cynthia_peters@worlded.org

Riva Pearson

ESOL teacher, Jewish Vocational Service, Hyde Park <u>rpearson@jvs-boston.org</u>

Next (and last) webinar: April 27, 2021, 4:00 pm (eastern)

