Discussing Race/Ethnicity & Cultural Issues in Classrooms and Schools

discussing issues of race and culture in schools is difficult and anxiety-provoking. some tips:

* attempt to establish some level of trust first
* Don’t attack the behavior…dissect it
* know the definitions of race, racism, instITutional racism, privilege, oppression, etc.
* tHINK ABOUT AND examine your own perceptions and baises and experiences first
* get comfortable with anger and push-back from others
* Don’t apologize for inserting the equity lens
* As with all difficult subjects-mastery takes times…but practice and ongoing reflection supports successful integration
* stress values, our love for our students, post-secondary goals, what unites us, what we want to achieve, etc.

Sentence Starters:

* Tell me more about…..
* How does this thinking impact (Students of Color, Students with Special Education Needs, GLBT Students, School Systems, etc?)
* Do you think that “our” perceptions of race/ethnicity are embedded in this situation? If so, how?
* Can we talk more about…..
* What do you have in common with your students? What differences do you see?
* What is your experience with culturally responsive teaching?
* How would you describe the culture of (1) Your classroom; (2) Of this school?
* How do your students demonstrate and talk about their culture/race/gender, etc?
* In what ways can we utilize our students’ prior knowledge to support learning?
* I noticed or observed that\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Was this on your radar as well? What is your thinking about this?
* When\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(student) is challenging or disconnected in the classroom (1) what do you feel (2) what do you think he/she is trying to say and; (3) what would be the best case scenario for both of you?
* What policies, procedures and curriculum support you and your particular population of students?
* What has been the best way to communicate expectations, behavior, etc., in the classroom/school?
* What students challenge you the most, what students do you enjoy the most?
* What do you mean when you say……?
* If we listened to our student’s voices, what would they tell us about our relationships with them?
* It’s always a challenge to talk about difficult subjects….how can we begin?

**Remember: Upfront or veiled accusations will be met with resistance………Our goal is to support critical thinking and reflection! Blatant disregard and racist or insensitive rhetoric may need to be confronted constructively and swiftly. There is no right or wrong answers. However, examining the intent of the individual may help with the specific approach.**

Sample Sentence Stems/Actions/Consciousness to Begin Difficult Conversations about Race/Ethnicity/Culture

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| The Scenario | Possible Supportive Response |
| A teacher is observed allowing a group of Latino & African American students to leave the classroom without intervention, allowing the students to make disparaging comments about themselves and others, and/or utilize inappropriate language in the classroom (“the N word,” I’m dumb,” “F-You,” “you’re gay,” etc) | * What are your classroom expectations? * How are your expectations aligned with the expectations of this school? * How do the words our children utilize impact their chances for success and their self-worth? * What do we want for our students? * Have you heard of the term, “Warm Demander?” |
| The number of suspensions at\_\_\_\_\_\_school is quite high particularly for African American boys. In a data meeting, the main focus is on the behavior of the boys. | * How can we look deeply and systemically at what our African American boys need? * What structures, supports and systems are supportive of our boys? * What policies and structures create barriers for African American boys? * How can we track suspensions closely to make sure we are scrutinizing our data through an equity lens? * How does bias and perceptions of African American Boys impact teaching, learning, perceptions, and behavior? (for both of us) * What classrooms seem to refer “our” African American boys the most? * What does our data tell us about what we must do to more successfully support African American Boys? |
| During lunch period, a group of girls are observed having a great deal of fun enjoying their free time singing, laughing and being quite boisterous. As one of the teachers supervising the lunch period, you hear another teacher refer to the girls as “loud and wild.” | * You respond, “Yes, our girls are quite vibrant and exciting.” (Re-structure the negative connotation and model an appropriate non-judgmental response). * What do you mean? (In a neutral tone) |
| In a meeting, the math skills of girls are perceived as less proficient, and girls are characterized as exhibiting more math anxiety than boys. | * I’m wondering if/when we characterize our girls as less proficient- we support them in acting less proficient…. * How can we utilize the culture of girls to support their math skills? * What kind of classroom groupings could support higher-level math skills? * Do you think bringing in women who have excelled in math and science as speakers would be a great way to support this challenge? * I have had to take a look at myself and how I have supported the math skills of girls in my classroom. In doing so, I found that I didn’t always recognize their skill level and need for differentiated learning. |

(Dr. Darlene Sampson/Office of Post-Secondary Readiness/Denver Public Schools/4-2014)