

# Widening the Lens

The Far Brook School Diversity Conference

## FACULTY CONSTITUENT GROUP CONVERSATION STARTERS

### QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

"Since the wider sense of community for all students and adults is compromised when racism is left unexamined, conversations on race and racism should be held across and among the various constituencies in the school community. Talking about race and racism is not something only black people and other people of color should do. While interracial dialogue that directly addresses race, racism, and privilege may be difficult to engage in, it is necessary that these conversations take place."

- Edith G. Arrington, Diane M. Hall, and Howard C. Stevenson  
*"The Success of African American Students in Independent Schools"*

"Look inside yourself and ask; have you ever thought that different racial groups have different intellectual abilities? You might immediately say "no." But the assumption is more ingrained than most Americans would like to admit. Indeed, after almost 600 years of programming, it would be surprising if you did not have this scientifically false notion somewhere in your head.

Over several centuries, social and natural scientists constructed the myth that "white" people were smarter than non-"white" people. They did so to justify European's enslavement of Africans, and worldwide European colonial conquest begun in the 1400s....

...The active effort to prove a lie - that the "races" differ in intellectual ability - has taken its toll on every one of us, regardless of the racial category through which we live our lives...

...American educators reactivate this cruel programming every time we imagine, even for a fleeting second, that student's physical appearance signals anything at all about their brain power. Since assumptions of racially distributed intelligence are in the air we breathe, antiracist practice requires actively resisting this notion. When we say that we have "high expectations for all students," we should think more specifically about what it is we are saying. What we really mean is that we are struggling against the expectations we have been programmed to have, that some "race groups" are smarter than others."

-Mica Pollock  
*Everyday AntiRacism*

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"Teachers don't want to say the wrong thing or offend someone. They are anxious about being age-appropriate. And they are worried about being asked a question they do not know how to answer. Teachers describe being scared, struggling with their words, or going blank when the topic of race or racism comes up.

Although teachers can appreciate that they need to see students as individuals and that it is not helpful to be "colorblind," they still often need a great deal of practice to be able to talk about race. I give teachers homework: Talk about race outside of school. "Talk about race to everybody you know. Call yourself white if that's how you identify." I give them examples; instead of "Did you see that woman in the blue sweater?" I tell them to say, "Oh, did you see that white woman in the blue sweater?" Practicing using the actual words is helpful.

Teachers should understand how race, including their own racial identities, impacts their classrooms. The goal is not just to support students of color, but to recognize the role of white people in perpetuating racism.

Jane Bolgatz, *Independent School Magazine*,  
"Helping Teachers to Become More Anti-Racist"

"Some of that will mean teaching students to analyze and reframe how they see values and stories from other cultures. Most of us were taught to praise white-dominant cultural ideas: financial success, rugged individualism, paternalism. Because of this, cultures with different priorities may not be seen as "successful" or "valuable" in our eyes and in the eyes of our students. We need to teach students with privilege not to be "saviors" for historically disenfranchised communities, but rather to listen to, value and stand in kinship with them so we can work together toward justice."

-Christina Torres, *Teaching Tolerance*,  
"All Students Need Anti-Racist Education"

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### #Blackat INSTAGRAM POSTS

“When you’re the only black student in the class, how do you tell an entire room of white people who claim to be this “liberal, accepting community” that this (saying the n-word) is violence? White students would read the passages and giggle at the fact that they were finally able to say this taboo word with impunity while looking at me to see my reaction. **Teachers often prioritize the comfort of white students over the emotional safety of black students.**”

*#Trauma*

*#WhoseNeedsArePrioritized?*

“This makes me think of how, during a mandatory “diversity fishbowl” in middle school, a white student told me that she often crossed the street whenever she saw me because she feared I’d rob her -- no teacher stepped in and (they) treated this as valid.”

*#SafeSpaces*

*#alone*

*#isolated*

*#FacultyComplicity*

“A few years ago, faculty members in the White Anti-Racist Affinity Group decided to do a public demonstration of their “allyship” by wearing buttons that said “Ask Me About My Whiteness”. This struck me as odd and performative.

Walking around the halls seeing white teachers proudly display these buttons was almost like an unnecessary reminder to people of color that not only were we the overwhelming minority, but we were surrounded by white people who were eager to broadcast their privilege to the world under the guise of taking action.

I would much rather these white teachers refocus their energies toward calling each other out on their biases and holding each other accountable for treating students of color with dignity and respect.

My biggest concern for the future is that white faculty will continue to put on these hollow performative displays to prove their wokeness, without actually doing the unseen introspective and reflective work required to ensure that all the students in their care are being educated responsibly. [I] know that many white faculty are reading this account religiously, and I guess I’m writing in to encourage them to think both big and small. Demanding institutional changes and policy initiatives is all well and good, but if individual teachers don’t actually examine and monitor their individual treatment of and

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interactions with students of color, then [the school] will never reform from the inside out."

#HollowDisplay

#PerformativeDiversity

"I am East Asian and teachers constantly call me by the wrong person's name. Usually, they mix me up with someone else in that class, but they've even confused me with students that weren't in the room. I know it's never intentional, but it makes me feel so horrible and dehumanized. It puts me in such an uncomfortable position because I have to either awkwardly correct them or let it slide and stand up for myself. I'm sick of being seen as interchangeable with my East Asian peers."

*#Belonging*

"Thank you to the teachers who constantly support students of color on campus. It means more than you will ever know. A lot of you were always there when I needed you the most. You made me feel not so alone *during my lifetime at [the school]*. I hope other students feel that same support."

*#Not so Alone*

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## QUESTIONS

**Question 1:** What professional development opportunities have teachers had to reflect on their own racial identity and develop an understanding of how their race impacts the classroom?

**Question 2:** How do you create a classroom culture where all students feel safe, respected, and affirmed? Consider curriculum content, resources and materials, what's on the walls.

**Question 3:** How do you ensure that various racial identities are acknowledged and celebrated even if they are not represented in your classroom?

**Question 4:** How have you adapted your curriculum to be more inclusive and less white-centric or to be anti-racist? Were changes made this school year in light of the events of the spring and summer?

**Question 5:** Do you have a specific curriculum in place to teach and talk about race?

**Questions 6:** What support do you have or need from your administration to better discuss race and racism in your classes.

**Question 7:** Are there guidelines in place for responding to/addressing racial incidents that arise in the classroom, on the playground, or elsewhere.