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# Supporting Positive Racial Identity Development

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“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

–Frederick Douglass“

“If you can show me how I can cling to that which is real for me, While teaching me a way into the larger society, then and only then will I drop my defenses and my hostilities, and I will sing your praises, and help you make the desert bear fruit.”

–Ralph Ellison

“Let the truth come out the way it wants to come out. Let the hearers utilize a different area of themselves to try to understand.”

–Malidoma Patrice Somé

“Fear is such a weak emotion and until you face your fears, it will be an extra weight on my back holding me back.

–Maria Peralta Porras

# Core Concepts

## *The Permanence of Racism*

We start out with the assumption that we live in a society where racism exists and has always existed. Students must understand how racism works so that they can both navigate a racist society and challenge oppression. Their path to navigate and challenge is called a *counternarrative*.

## *Counternarrative... What's Your Story?*

Every student needs their own path. Students of color cannot afford to let their story be written by stereotypes and statistics. A “counternarrative” is the student’s own story. A counternarrative is the way someone navigates the tricky path of a racist society and finds a way to be successful.

## *Horizontal and Vertical Allies*

As a young person pursues their counternarrative path, they need allies to support them on their journey. Horizontal allies are people who are traveling the path along with you. Vertical allies are people who have travelled the path before you or who can help you along your path.

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### Vertical Allies:

- Family
- Mentors
- Teachers
- Coaches
- Role Models
- Heroes
- Older Students

### Horizontal Allies:

Peers who help you on your counternarrative journey.

H O R I Z O N T A L A L L I E S

# Dialogue Skills

*One key to dealing with race is being able to talk about it.*

## Talk About Race

- Speak Your Truth
- Stay Engaged
- Experience Discomfort
- Expect and Accept Non-Closure

Whenever race is an issue,  
racism is an issue. And race  
is always an issue.

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**Race = Racism ? Racist**

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But, if racism is an issue, how do  
we know if someone or someplace  
is being racist? What does “racist”  
mean?

## *Both / And...*

These topics are complex. Any  
time someone tries to make things  
an “either/or” choice, it’s probably  
not that simple. Instead, we try to  
explore how things can be “both/  
and”. For instance, a student  
might be both Mexican and  
American.

## *Yes, And...*

Keep the conversation  
flowing by adding  
perspectives rather than  
disagreeing. Using words like  
“but” or “no” shuts things  
down. Try saying “Yes I see  
what you are saying, and my  
perspective is...”

## Intention / Impact

“I didn’t mean it that way” isn’t an  
acceptable excuse. We always have to  
be accountable for our impact, even  
when it wasn’t our intention. “I’m sorry  
that I hurt you. Thanks for sharing  
your perspective.”

# Video Discussions

## Monday

### **Power of a Single Story: Introduction of Concepts**

Watch video to define concepts. Write examples on handout. Share.

### **Ethnic Notions: The Permanence of Racism**

- A professor mentioned “images of the past are still with us.” Do you see these images now? Maybe in an “updated” form on TV shows, movies, cartoons, or commercials?
- What types of racism in the film do you think are gone today?
- The images from the film are so common in our society, is it possible for some people to use them without being racist?
- Most of the examples of racism in the film aren’t directed towards any particular person. How do you respond when you see something that might be racist but it’s not directed at you?
- What is a stereotype? How are stereotypes and racism related to one another?

## Tuesday

### **Freedom Writers: Counternarratives**

- Which of the Freedom Writers did you relate to the most?
- How did these students create their counternarratives?
- Can you give examples of how the students became horizontal allies?
- Who were examples of their vertical allies? How did their vertical allies help them?

## Wednesday

### **Selena: Identity and Family**

- Is Selena Mexican or American? How would you describe her racial identity?
- In what ways was her dad helping her create her counternarrative? In what ways was he holding her back?
- Were there any ways that Selena’s dad had internalized racism?
- In what ways does your family help you develop your identity? In what ways do they hold you back?

## Thursday

### **Remember The Titans: Horizontal and Vertical Allies**

- What examples of horizontal allies did you see in the film?
- What examples of vertical allies did you see in the film?
- You and your friends won’t see the same form of racism that the Titans did. What challenges will you need horizontal allies to help you address?
- How would you compare the Titans to the NC DREAM Team?

# Local and Living History

Thanks for agreeing to meet with students in Blue Ribbon Mentor-Advocate's new program, Seeking the Self. There are 16 students participating, all of whom are going into 7th or 8th grade next year (age 12-14).

Seeking the Self has a ground breaking curriculum that we have developed with the local arts organization Hidden Voices to help students develop a positive racial identity. Everything in the program is based on research that shows that using the arts to promote positive racial identity for students of color can make a significant difference in improving their achievement in school. We're very hopeful about the results we will see.

Each morning, we will be introducing the students to someone from the community who has a productive "counternarrative" to share with them. A counternarrative is a story of how you successfully navigate a racially biased system to pursue your strengths and interests. We would like to ask you to share your counternarrative with the students one morning. Throughout the camp, all of the students will be developing their own counternarratives, and we believe you are an amazing role model for them.

When you come, a BRMA staff member will facilitate an interview with you. Then we will engage the students in a dialogue. The basic questions we expect to ask you are:

- What was your path to understanding the role race plays in your life?
- In what ways has your race helped and hindered you in life?
- Who were your allies (both peers and mentors) who helped you navigate your path?
- What role have you played in fighting for racial justice in our community.

Please join us at **Camp New Hope**, 4805 NC Hwy 86, Chapel Hill NC 27514. We will be in the Dogwood building, which is the first building on the right when you enter the camp.

**Our session will be from 8:30-9:30 AM.** Feel free to join us at 8:00 AM for breakfast if you would like to.

We're so glad you're coming.

Thanks,



## *Schedule:*

Tuesday 8/9: Mauricio Castro  
Wednesday 8/10: Valerie Foushee  
Thursday 8/11: NC DREAM Team  
Friday 8/12: Braxton Foushee

# Just Because...

## **Just because I'm Black**

Doesn't mean I'm ghetto  
Doesn't mean I like rap  
Doesn't mean I eat fried chicken,  
watermelon, and drink  
Kool-Aid.

Just because I'm Black  
Some people think I'm not smart  
Think I fight a lot  
Think I'm on welfare  
Think I'm fast.

Just because I'm Black  
I know  
It will be harder  
There will be challenges  
I have to exceed expectations

But I also know  
Harriet Tubman didn't free slaves for  
nothing.  
Rosa Parks didn't give up her seat for  
nothing  
Martin Luther King didn't have a  
dream for nothing

So I will sit at the front of the bus  
instead of the back  
And NOT pay no mind to people who  
try and bring me down!

## **Just because I'm Hispanic**

Doesn't mean I don't know their  
language  
Doesn't mean I'm an immigrant  
Doesn't mean I'm never going to fit in  
with other races.  
And it doesn't mean  
I'm Mexican!

Just because I'm Hispanic  
Some people think  
I have no manners  
I'm a bad influence  
I'm stuck with no future:  
I will get pregnant early  
Drop out of school  
Do drugs.

Just because I'm Hispanic  
I know  
Not everyone is fair  
I have to work hard to succeed  
I can achieve what they say I can't.

And I will  
Never give up,  
Never be ashamed of my race,  
Never forget where I come from.

## When it Happened...

When it happened...  
I wanted to hit him  
He was suppose to be my friend  
Because my name is Islamic  
He called me a terrorist  
I'm a middle school student  
Who likes alternative rock music  
Like AudioSlave  
I wanted to hit him  
But I didn't

When it happened...  
It was my first time in the U.S.A  
I didn't know his name  
He was black  
He called me bad names  
I didn't speak English then  
When I went to lunch people tripped me  
A lot of people did it  
It made me really mad  
I wanted to eat but I couldn't  
I threw my lunch in the trash  
One nice girl gave me an apple  
That was five years ago.

My mouth was watering when it  
happened...  
French fries, chicken, burgers  
I didn't know you could look  
At a person and tell if they spoke  
English  
The cashier thought she could  
As she tried to explain to me in  
Spanish  
What a hamburger was  
Babbling on and on as I tried to tell her  
What she never asked  
I do speak English and yes  
I know what a combo meal is

When it happened...  
It made me mad and sad

At the same time  
Maybe he thought it was funny  
To say to me as we walked through  
the mall  
That my brother and I  
Could stop by the food court  
Get some chicken and watermelon  
I asked him why he said that  
He said that's what black people eat  
I don't even like watermelon

When it happened...  
I wondered why the annoying person  
Asked me if I liked Kool-Aid  
Was it because I'm Black?

I was at lunch when it happened...  
You could smell the pizza  
A boy came up to me  
And said I looked gangster  
Maybe because of the way I dress  
Maybe because of my corn rows  
In a way it made me feel cool I think  
But I'm not a gangster

When it happened...  
I got in trouble at school  
The white kid in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade  
With curly hair, said my parents were  
immigrants  
Said my mom and dad have crappy jobs  
That I'd be stuck in that school  
The same school he was in  
My mom and dad have good jobs  
And I like my school  
When the teacher called me in the room  
I slammed the door  
I just meant to close it  
That didn't matter to my teacher  
Didn't matter to her that it happened  
And I don't know just maybe  
Because it didn't happen to her.

# Is it Really Necessary?

It happens all the time  
At Wal-Mart, the playground, in math  
class,  
the lobby, in gym, at the swimming  
pool.

Eyes staring at me because I'm Black,  
Hispanic, African-American, Latina,  
different.  
It smells like chlorine,  
like cotton candy,  
like sweat  
like the gapping difference between  
me and them  
It smells like racism;  
It smells like hate.

They asked me if I was Chinese  
because my eyes are squinted.  
I'm Mexican and what does that  
have to do with my eyes?  
That right there made me feel  
ashamed.

Is it really necessary?  
It smells like racism.  
It smells like hate.

Hanging out with my friends one  
spring day  
That smelled like flowers  
"Why do you talk like that?"  
Cause English is not my first language,  
and I'm learning.  
They said no matter how hard I tried  
I would never be one of them.

Is it really necessary?  
It smells like racism.  
It smells like hate.

At the pool, they stared at me and  
rolled their eyes  
Was it my bathing suit, my hair,  
or how I didn't match the white  
person I was with?  
You never know.  
I just wanted to get out.

She explained the assignment once  
but I didn't understand  
so I asked for help.  
"Are you serious? You still don't get  
it? Wow."  
Then she started speaking really really  
slowly  
as if I were stupid.  
Not to the white kids who needed help.  
Just me.

This stuff is as old and as complicated  
as cobwebs;  
Gym teachers, assistant principals,  
cashiers, girls on the playground,  
people at Wal-Mart:  
Is it really necessary?  
It smells like racism;  
It smells like hate.

# Brown

Brown is a shopping bag  
Brown is hope  
Brown is the pencil I use to write these  
words.



Brown is the roads on my barrio  
Hard work  
Brown is a world cup championship.

Brown is the cement walks that know  
everything you say  
My failing, my success  
Brown is an autumn night in the  
neighborhood.

Brown is feet dancing  
The smell of dust, a waterfall  
Brown is the sand washed into the wet  
shore.

Brown is the smell of cinnamon; the color of  
a pie crust  
Bigger than the universe  
Brown is the smell of pancakes.

Brown is the bark of trees, smooth wood  
The people that one day need justice  
Brown is a seed.

Brown is our roots,  
the plants, the people  
Brown is my family, my life.

Brown is the color of history  
the hope the world has been looking for  
Brown is the people united.

Brown is the color that has made me the  
person that I am today



# I Am the Difference

I respect  
but do not define myself  
by the color of my skin,  
Because the me that you see  
Is not the me that I am.

## **Let me introduce you to myself:**

I am graceful, optimistic, and rad;  
athletic, courageous, and kind;  
Creative, persistent, curious, and fun.  
Every day I learn the truth of my story.

And whether you think I can make a  
difference  
Or not  
Is beside the point.  
The point is not what you think  
But what I do.

Because once, when I was at the  
movies,  
In the mall,  
At a restaurant,  
In school,  
Once, when I was anywhere at all,

A teacher  
A mentor,  
A counselor,  
A coach,  
Said to me: You have potential  
Said: I'm proud of you  
Said: You will succeed  
Said: Never give up your dreams  
Said: You can do it, you're unique,  
you're talented, you matter,  
And all the other words we use to say:  
**I love you.**

I still remember.  
It made a difference.  
And I can pass it on.  
I can make a difference  
Because once I  
Saw a student being bullied  
Heard a kid who didn't speak the  
language  
Saw someone on crutches  
Met a homeless person  
Saw undocumented students fighting  
for their rights

And instead of looking away  
Or laughing  
Ignoring it  
Or acting like I didn't care  
Pretending I was different

Instead of all the things I could have  
done  
I calmed everyone down  
Offered to translate  
Carried her bags  
Handed the homeless person my  
taco.  
Stood up and said,  
**"I'm undocumented, too."**

You can keep power for yourself  
Or you can pass it on  
I know which makes you stronger.  
Keep moving forward.  
I have a purpose here.  
I can make a difference  
Because it's something I've already  
done.

**How about you?**

# Supporting Your Child's Racial Identity

Your child is growing up in a different world and culture than the one you grew up in. But you are still their primary teacher about culture.

Help your child understand their own culture. They get strength from the roots and traditions of their family's culture. At the same time they're feeling pulled into mainstream American culture. This is why we teach the students the idea of BOTH/AND. They are BOTH (Latino/African-American/Karen) AND American. At the same time, they don't totally fit in with either culture. *Instead of making them choose between the two, help them live with both.*

Be open to what the students learn. Your child may challenge some of your beliefs as they explore their own identity. This is a normal part of the process. Encourage them to explore. Here are some things you can do:

1. **USE CULTURE TO PROMOTE RACIAL IDENTITY.** A child's home culture is the basis for positive racial identity development. Parents and mentors can help a child learn more about the positive elements of their own culture.

Examples: Talk with your child about being BOTH African-American/Latino/Karen AND American. Take your child to cultural celebrations. Help your child become fluent in speaking, reading, and writing your native language.

2. **USE CULTURE AND RACIAL IDENTITY AS SOMETHING POSITIVE.** Once a child learns about his or her own culture, it's important that they see how their culture will help them in the world. Children need to see their race as something that helps them be strong rather than something that will keep them from being successful.

Examples: Show your child examples of people who have used their race for strength on their path to success. Tell your child about the positive and strong values and characteristics of your culture. Use stories and sayings from your culture to help your child when he or she is struggling.

3. **EDUCATE ABOUT RACISM AND RACIAL UPLIFT.** Be open in talking with your child about how racism impacts people of color. At the same time, talk about how people from his/her race have become successful in spite of the racism they faced. Also, teach about how people have worked together for racial uplift.

Examples: Tell your child your own counternarrative about facing racism and finding a path to become successful. Even if it seems they don't want to listen, kids remember the stories that their parents and role models tell them about their own lives. Introduce your child to role models who are working for racial justice. Engage your child in organized efforts to improve conditions for people of color.

4. **KEEP EXPLORING THE ARTS.** The arts are culture, and they are the ideal way for any child to explore culture. Research shows that children who participate in arts programs that include a student's culture promote learning in many areas.

Examples: Enroll your child in arts classes in school or in the community. Participate in community art programs sponsored by local organizations. Provide your child opportunities to pursue their personal interests in the arts at home or on their own time.

5. **SUPPORT ALLY RELATIONSHIPS.** Every child needs horizontal and vertical allies. Horizontal allies are peers who work together to support each other's path to success. Vertical allies are adults or older youth who can help a child along their path.

Examples: Keep your child engaged in BRMA events where they have horizontal allies. Make sure your child meets regularly with his or her mentor. Expose your child to as many role models as possible. Introduce your child to elders in your community that would be good role models for your child. Ask members of your family who have become successful to talk with your child about how they did it.

6. **ASSUME SUCCESS.** The world assumes children of color will fail. You must do the opposite. Make it clear that your expectation is that they will not be a victim of stereotypes or racism. Communicate that it is not just your hope they will succeed, but that you have no doubt that they will.

Examples: Always talk with your child about "when" they go to college, rather than "if" they go to college. Give your child affirming messages like, "I know you won't let that stop you." Make it clear to teachers that your expectations for your child are high, and you will not accept a teacher having lower expectations for success than your own.

7. **PROMOTE ACTIVE LEARNING.** Learning about culture is an interactive process. It requires your child's active involvement. The worst thing you can do is let them choose not to participate in opportunities that will be valuable learning experiences. Get them out and interacting with anyone who can help their journey.

Examples: Seek out opportunities provided by BRMA, your child's school, or other organizations that will expose your child to cultural learning opportunities and new role models / allies. Require your child to try these activities even if he or she says they don't want to. A lot of times, you may find that they enjoy the experience a lot more than they thought they would.

8. **INFORM YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL.** Schools may not always teach much about your culture or follow these guidelines, but you can always ask them to. Your active involvement can change the school community so that it is more likely to embrace your child and contribute to his/her positive racial identity.

Examples: Talk with your child's teachers and others in your schools about why your culture is important to you. Help your school organize events and celebrations that promote cultural understanding. Tell your child's teachers about things from your culture that are related to what your child is learning.

9. **ACKNOWLEDGE THE CHALLENGES.** Developing a counternarrative and a positive racial identity is a challenging battle in our society. Expect your child's journey to be a path with many curves, ups, and downs. Expect the path to be challenging and difficult, to require courage and determination, and to be rewarding.

\*Adapted from the work of Dr. Mary Stone Hanley and Dr. George Noblit.



## CORE TEXTS FOR RACIAL EQUITY

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Davis, Bonnie. *How to Teach Students Who Don't Look Like You*. A guide to reflective practice for working effectively with students of different races and cultures from your own.

Delpit, Lisa. *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. A seminal and critical look at how race and culture impact schooling. The book is especially helpful for examining why educators so rarely talk openly about race.

Hanley, Mary Stone and Noblit, George. *Cultural Responsiveness, Racial Identity, and Academic Success: A Review of the Literature*. A thorough overview of the research connecting race and student achievement commissioned by the Heinz Foundation.

Howard, Gary. *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools*. Howard gives us a very personal look at the complexities of being a white educator trying to address racial issues.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children*. Describes how some teachers (of all races) have been successful with African-American children.

*Find additional resources at:*

[bit.ly/CraigMeyerPresentations](https://bit.ly/CraigMeyerPresentations)

[bit.ly/RacialIdentity](https://bit.ly/RacialIdentity)

Perry, Theresa, Hilliard, Asa and Steele, Claude. *Young, Gifted, and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African American Students*. Perry advances a theory about how and why African-Americans excel in education. Steele discusses the impact of "stereotype threat." Hilliard examines how we can close the achievement gap by using tools, skills, and knowledge that we already have in our possession.

Singham, Mano. "The Canary in the Mine: The Achievement Gap Between Black and White Students" *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 80, No. 1. September 1998. Singham debunks many of the myths commonly used to explain why students of color are not learning. He provides examples of how schools can be responsible for overcoming external barriers to success.

Singleton, Glenn and Curtis Linton. *Courageous Conversations about Race*. A field guide for educators who want to explore race and equity in a professional context. Includes staff development activities.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*. An excellent primer for understanding racial identity development of all students.