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
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.

Vertical Allies:
- Family
- Mentors
- Teachers
- Coaches
- Role Models
- Heroes
- Older Students

Horizontal Allies:
- Peers who help you on your counternarrative journey.
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.

Race = Racism ? Racist

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 groundbreaking 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,

Blue Ribbon Mentor-Advocate

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:
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 8th 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. You 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

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 form 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.


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.

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.


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

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.

Find additional resources at:
bit.ly/GraigMeyerPresentations
bit.ly/RacialIdentity