



Handout

## **Pedagogical Principles for Talking About Race**

### **1. PREPARE YOURSELF**

Talking about race is like any difficult or uncomfortable conversation. It is important to be mindful, self-aware, and in control of your emotions. It is also important to be confident that you CAN have difficult or uncomfortable conversations. Before you broach the topic of race with your students, do a self-assessment. Note what your vulnerabilities are and what you are concerned about. Then identify your strengths as well as what you need to do or learn to move forward.

### **2. DEFINE TERMS**

Conversations are difficult to have if there is not a uniform understanding of the language being used. Create a common language by defining terms prior to discussions.

### **3. PROVIDE BACKGROUND ON THE HISTORY OF RACE AND RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES**

Ensure that students understand the history and the contributions of Indigenous people, African American/Black people, Asian American and Pacific Islander people, and Latin American/Latin-X people in the United States; these histories are United States history. In addition to learning about contributions and strengths of these communities, students should learn about racist policies that still have an impact today.

### **4. FOSTER EMPATHY**

Students should be given the opportunity to engage with their own identity and develop a sense of self-awareness around how they experience the world. Then challenge students to have empathy for the feelings and experiences of people of color in the United States. Not all people have the same experiences. Challenge students to understand different attitudes and perspectives while refraining from simulation activities.

## **5. CREATE A SAFE AND BRAVE SPACE**

When talking about race, just like with any challenging topic, it is important to be mindful of your students' psychological safety. This means creating a space where students feel comfortable sharing their true feelings without fear of negative repercussions. This can be done by using discussion principles or ground rules in the beginning of discussions and by using age-appropriate materials. It also means being prepared to address strong emotions and end every conversation on an empowering and positive note. Strong and authentic relationships between students and between adults and students must be built prior to these conversations.

*How do you build psychological safety?*

1. Start with building authentic relationships in the classroom and school community.
2. Make sure your curriculum and your classroom reflect a diversity of identities and experiences.
3. Model curiosity – ask a lot of questions.
4. Be vulnerable – acknowledge that you do not always have the answer and are learning with your students.
5. Teach social emotional skills and conflict resolution skills.
6. Create an atmosphere of growth mindset – mistakes are learning opportunities.
7. Create symbols or processes to gauge the readiness of the group to have the difficult conversation. For example, a stop light graphic where red means you are not ready/willing to talk, yellow means you are not entirely comfortable but are willing to try, and green means you are ready and comfortable to move forward. This can also be done with a thumbs down, thumbs to the side, or a thumbs up. If too many people are not ready you may need to find out what is needed to forward.

## **6. ENCOURAGE CRITICAL THINKING**

Support students sharing ideas and asking questions of themselves and others.

## **7. DISCUSS DATA AND POLICY**

Study and discuss data related to race at your school. For example – discipline data. When you notice racial disparities, bring it up and encourage reflection and action. What policies might be changed/eliminated?