

Discussion Guide

Courageous Conversations About Race in Schools

The following questions are designed to serve as a starting point for educators, parents, students and community members to think in new ways about race in schools. Our hope is that we will have more meaningful discussions about racial equity, authentically reflect on our part in eradicating racism in schools, and grow in ways that lead to excellence personally and in our schools.

Viewed with the series of short videos [Courageous Conversations About Race in Schools](#), the questions serve as a starting point for meaningful discussions, reflection, and research. Use these prompts (and some of your own questions) to initiate real discourse within your school community informally or formally, as part of your team's professional learning.

Megan Allen, 2010 Florida State Teacher of the Year, NNSTOY member
Michelle Pearson, 2011 Colorado State Teacher of the Year, NNSTOY member

Videos are located on the NNSTOY website at: <http://www.nnstoy.org/equity-education-courageous-conversations-race/>

Overview Questions

- To what extent do improvements to education depend on us attaining educational equity?
- How do you distinguish between *equity* and *equality* in the classroom setting? Are they the same thing? How do parents of our students define and differentiate between equity and equality? How do the terms relate to the teaching profession?
- How can we view culture, heritage and race as resource in our profession?
- What support mechanisms do we need in place to recruit, retain and develop a diverse workforce?
- How can we use the inquiry process to reflect on and explore what we do *and* don't know about equity in the classroom?
- How can we rethink the questions we ask during professional development, team collaboration, and building-wide professional development so that they encourage professionals to look through an equity lens?
- In what ways does a dominantly white culture impact your school and classroom? In what ways is it enforced on students?

Video-Specific Questions

Video #1: "What is Equity?"

- How do you connect with this video?
- What was your first reaction to the video? What comes to mind?
- How do you define equity? Do you agree with the definition offered by 2012 Maryland State Teacher of the Year Josh Parker?
- What happens when people have different definitions of equity? Is this a good thing or a bad thing? How do we justify this as educators, and how do we keep this in mind in our practice?
- In the video Josh Parker poses a question: How are we setting up systems so students can live life on their own terms? Why is this an important question to ask? What is your answer to the question?
- How can we make gentle pushes to the system so that students can live their lives and be successful on their own terms?
- How do your students (or children) define equity? How does this shape your thinking as an educator or a parent? Should a student's definition of equity change our practice? Why or why not?
- How can you share this video? What stakeholders would benefit from viewing it?

Video #2: "Teachers Have to Believe"

- How do you connect with this video? What emotions does this bring to the surface for you?
- Fact or fiction: Most educators believe that all kids can succeed. (Explain your thinking)
- Why do you teachers have different expectations for different students? Give an example of when you have seen this in practice in your school or district.
- How can we re-calibrate ourselves as educators in order to have high expectations for all students and teachers?
- How can we safely establish a collective starting point in our schools about the feelings educators have about their students? Would this data help move us forward as educators? What might we do with it? What considerations do you need to think through before taking yourself or colleagues through this process?

Video #3: "Why Don't We Have More Black Teachers?"

- How do you connect with this video?
- Jose Vilson starts off by stating that language matters, that even using terms like "minority" can be problematic. When does language matter? How does language influence the diversity of our teaching population?
- 2015 Washington State Teacher of the Year Nate Bowling asserts that we don't have more teachers of color because we have yet to create in all schools places where students of color feel loved, valued, and respected. To what extent is this true in your school community? What factors contribute to this? How might we improve the experience that students and teachers of color feel in school?
- Do you know how students of color in your class or school feel about their school experience? Why or why not? How does this help or hinder you as an educator? What steps can you take to explore how they are feeling and use this data to create a better learning environment for all of us?
- 2007 Minnesota State Teacher of the Year Lee-Ann Stephens points out that we continue to have the same conversations about recruiting teachers of color that we were having 28 years ago. Why is this challenge so persistent? What can we do, individually and as a school community, to improve this outcome?
- What supports do we currently have to retain teachers of color? What supports are needed in the future?
- What are you doing to support and retain teachers of color? What might you consider doing?
- Share an example of something happening in your school, district, state, or region to address the challenges to retain teachers of color.
- Josh Parker raises the idea of direct feedback with language teachers use for their students. How do you have conversations with colleagues to help them address biases that they may not see? How might you have someone help you identify any biases that you may not see in yourself or your practice?
- How do we find the courage to have the conversations we need to have to address issues of retention and recruitment?

Video #4: "Impact of Micro-aggressions"

- How do you connect with this video?
- What is a micro-aggression? What are some examples?
- What is your experience with micro-aggressions? What is your students' experience with micro-aggressions?
- Do your students classify micro-aggressions as bullying? Why or why not?
- Wesley Williams raised research that showed students of color experience an average 291 micro-aggressions in a 90-day period. How might these micro-aggressions affect a student's school experience? What can we do as educators? Parents? Administrators? Community members?
- Nate Bowling said he doesn't use the term micro-aggressions anymore? What point is he trying to make? Do you agree with him?
- Ken Patterson shared a powerful story about being told that his enthusiasm as a Black male educator might scare the students, especially those who are not Black. What are your thoughts about his idea? Why is this problematic? What can we do if we hear comments like that, as both teachers of color or allies? What other "white norms" negatively impact teachers and students of colors?

Video #5: "Do You Have to Be A Teacher of Color to Teach Students of Color?"

- How do you connect with this video?
- Josh Parker poses a great question: if you are not a teacher of color, what can you do to support the students of color each day? What is your answer to this?
- Josh follows up by saying, "Whatever you can do to disrupt is where we start." What does this mean to you? What does he mean when he uses the term "disrupt"? Where can you begin as an educator to disrupt racism?
- What are some of the disruptions that you see happening already in your profession? Where are these occurring and how?
- What is "whiteness" doing to our schools?
- Jose Vilson poses another great question: "How are you having the conversation about people of color with white kids?" How do you answer him?
- From Jose Vilson: How do we create a place for our students to talk about other cultures that are different, but are not "less than?" How do we do this with our colleagues?
- 2015 Minnesota State Teacher of the Year Tom Rademacher shares a dream that he hopes every school he works in has a culture where it is more uncomfortable not to talk about race than to talk about race. Why do you think he says this? How do we ourselves get there and how do we encourage our colleagues to move with us?

Video #6: "Disruptive Mindset"

- Josh Parker claims that the education system we have created is operating at peak efficiency, just as it was designed to. He argues further that there is an industry built around the failure of students of color. What does this mean to you? Why is it so insidious? How can we be disruptors of this system? How can we support our schools in changing this "industry"?
- What part are you playing in the system described above? Are you an enabler or a dismantler? What do you need to do to shift your stance?
- How can teaching be a disruptive process?
- Jose Vilson states that the best way to subvert is to ask a good question. How might this work as you ask questions of yourself? Of your colleagues? Of your policies in your school? Of your system? Of your state?
- What questions would you ask to disrupt this system? How can you bring this disruptive mindset to the national level?
- How can you give yourself a check-in about your own mindset and lens?
- As an educator, how are we all responsible in some way for engaging in this concept?

Find other resources to teach social justice, including reading materials and our Social Justice Book List on the [NNSTOY website](http://www.nnstoy.org/social-justice-equity-education/): <http://www.nnstoy.org/social-justice-equity-education/>

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