

You may be wondering ...

Will the Identity Project bring up race issues that don't exist in our school, and actually create tensions that aren't there?

We have thought about this possibility very carefully and developed the Identity Project based on the most rigorous and cutting-edge research on issues of ethnicity and race in today's classrooms.

Why Does Talking About Race Matter?

Although race is a taboo topic in our society and many of us have learned from an early age that it should not matter,¹ **ignoring race or avoiding conversations about race with students can impede their success in the classroom.** This attitude is known as **colorblindness**,² and it can be particularly harmful to students of color.³ Expressing a colorblind attitude in the classroom can alienate students of color by not acknowledging the reality of their negative racial experiences, like when they experience race-based discrimination. In addition, a colorblind attitude can communicate to students of color that their cultural background is not valuable and worth 'seeing' - the exact opposite of the intended message.



Race and Racial Issues are Everywhere



Whether or not students bring this up with you directly, students are thinking about race, talking about race, and research shows that it's informing their peer choices. Awareness of race and using it as a form of social exclusion begins **as early as preschool**.⁴ By adolescence, students are routinely interacting with one another online (e.g., Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat). What's more, **racial discrimination happens online**, and research has shown these experiences have negative implications for students' mental health.⁵

How Does the Identity Project Help?

The Identity Project provides the opportunity, space, and time to facilitate constructive discussions about ethnicity and race with students through a series of guided lessons and activities. An experimental test of the Identity Project curriculum has shown it **helps students explore and better understand what their ethnic-racial identity means to them**,⁶ which over time **positively impacts their self-esteem, academic adjustment, and mental health**.⁷



Journaling Activity

Some students may think racism is a thing of the past. They may feel that we need to know about racism in terms of our country's history, but in the present day, should move on from discussing racism. Some students may also believe that, although we see many stories in the news about racism, this reflects bias in the media and events being blown out of proportion. If this is the case for your students, a useful activity for your class might be to engage students in a one- to two-week journaling exercise, in which:



- they explore different forms of media and identify the ways that race and ethnicity are coming up;
- they visit a public, common space (e.g. a public park, a shopping mall) and record what they notice about race and ethnicity;
- they observe interactions in their school cafeteria and record what they notice about race and ethnicity.

You may then use these journaling reflections to engage in a large group discussion about the ways that race and ethnicity show up in our everyday lives. Consider integrating excerpts from Beverly Tatum's book (see below) as you plan your discussion with students.

Key Takeaway:

Students are thinking and talking about race and ethnicity regardless of whether educators raise this topic in their classrooms. The Identity Project curriculum provides an opportunity for educators to engage their students in scaffolded conversations on ethnicity, race, and identity.

References and Articles for Further Reading:

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