

WHAT IS ETHNIC-RACIAL IDENTITY?

- Ethnic-racial identity (ERI) is an important aspect of all student's identity - minority and majority groups included. ERI includes the self-conception of one's ethnic heritage, one's racial identity and the significance that these identities might hold throughout one's life. It includes one's own opinions and feelings toward their own ethnicity and race. [6]
- The formation of ERI typically begins with adolescence and continues to develop throughout one's life, with major milestones likely to occur throughout young adulthood. The importance of adolescence for ERI is tied directly to the developmental capacities of adolescence, namely their ability to conceive of broader social systems and existing inequalities, as well as the formation of their moral and social capacities. [7]
- ERI has proven to be a protective measure for adolescents in the face of discrimination. For all ethnic-racial groups, white students included, ERI development can be considered a positive and necessary process for healthy adolescent adjustment. [6]

1. SELF-REFLECTION

In order to help students foster their own ERI, adults and teachers must do the same. Without understanding the role in which ERI affects your perspective and the way others perceive you, mentors and adults will likely be less capable of conducting healthy and honest conversations amongst students. [9]

3. HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP THEIR OWN IDENTITY

For students to engage in developing their ERI, in a healthy and productive manner, adults must understand the specific components that contribute to ERI development. Providing students safe places to explore their identity (through developed curriculum or sanctioned conversations) can ignite interest and curiosity within adolescents. [6]

HOW IS IT MEASURED?

In recent decades, researchers have narrowed their understanding of the formation of ERI into two categories: process and content.

The **content** of ERI includes four main components:

- **affirmation:** feelings towards their ethnic-racial group.
- **public regard:** how positively one believes their ethnic-racial group is perceived by others.
- **centrality:** the importance one places on their group identification.
- **salience:** how relevant their race or ethnicity is to their lives.

The **process** of ERI development is made up of two separate dimensions: *exploration* and *resolution*.

- **exploration:** engagement in activities and thoughts that increase one's understanding of the role of their ERI.
- **resolution:** one's decision surrounding how important their ERI will factor into their own identity. [8]

WAYS TO PROMOTE ERI

2. TALK ABOUT IT

Do not shy away from tough conversations. Adolescents can and will recognize diversity, injustices and social inequalities. Providing a safe space for students to digest these experiences and perceptions will allow students to develop healthy communication skills, in collaboration with their peers. [6]

4. HONOR BOTH: AFFINITY & DIVERSITY

Research points to the values of diverse environments for ERI development. Having said that, it is equally as important to allow students the opportunity to talk within their affinity groups. The shared experiences of affinity groups can be protective, just as the differences of opinions and perceptions can illustrate the intergroup diversity within affinity groups. [10]



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FOLLOW-UP RESOURCES:

- **Teaching Ideas for Classroom Conversation:** Spiegler, Jinnie. "First Encounters With Race and Racism: Teaching Ideas for Classroom Conversations." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 27 Sept. 2017.
- **How to Have Conversations with a Diverse Group of Youth:** "Youth Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity." *Youth Civil Rights*, youthcivilrights.org/youth-dialogues-on-re/
- **Classroom Resources Built By Teaching Tolerance:** <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources>
- **Suggestions for White Educators:** Utt, Jamie, and Shelly Tochluk. "White Teacher, Know Thyself: Improving Anti-Racist Praxis Through Racial Identity Development."
- **Social Studies Curriculum:** "Facing History and Ourselves" <https://www.facinghistory.org/>
- **Further Reading:** Rivas-Drake, Deborah, and Umaña-Taylor Adriana J. *Below the Surface: Talking with Teens about Race, Ethnicity, and Identity*. Princeton University Press, 2019.