

WHILE YOU
READ,
CONSIDER
EVERYDAY
ANTIRACISM
IN SCHOOLS

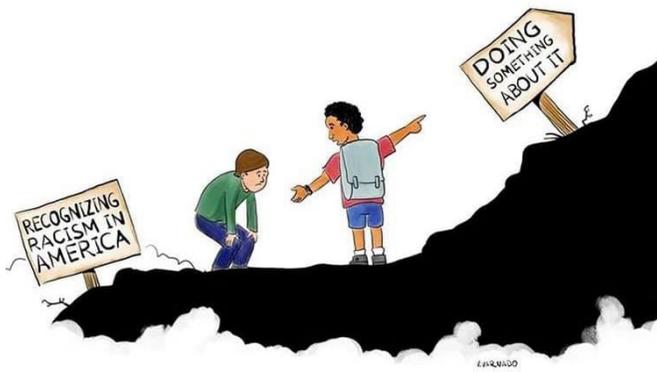


A #Schooltalking
Conversation Starter
Mica Pollock

Talk tools for antiracism
& equity in
school communities

Schooltalking

curated by
Mica Pollock



“Actually, we’re just getting started.”

In the past weeks, the floodgates have opened for calls for antiracist learning, particularly by white people. The brutal murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, combined with the ongoing multi-year push of the Black Lives Matter movement, have finally ignited national rage about anti-Black brutality and demands for justice in policing. And the country is also exploding with antiracist reading lists, most crucially books and articles by Black people. (Here’s one pretty [amazing list](#); [here’s another](#).) It’s essential for white people (I am white) to listen and read; so many of us have had so little proactive education on these issues in schools, homes, or society. We’re being asked to learn, quite rapidly, what Black people particularly have told us for centuries: that we’ve been falsely framed as “superior” “types of people,” and funneled disproportionate opportunities and power accordingly. It’s painful understanding, and we’re being asked to dive in — and act on it immediately.

Indeed, the “next level” step is to embed antiracist realizations into antiracist action — particularly important for white people rarely found acting. This embedding is a lifelong process. While we read the deep antiracism of books and articles and focus on the immediate problem of racist policing, that is, we will have several tasks:

- 1) to *recognize and rethink* “white supremacy,” meaning the deep ways we have been treated falsely as “more than” others;
- 2) to *refuse to participate* further in normalizing such harm to fellow human beings; and
- 3) to consider ways to *repair* racism in our own lives and our society.

Our K12 schools are key places we can learn to see racism and join antiracism every day. In schools and school systems, racism (a habit of treating white people as more worthy and people of color as less so) is embedded in so much. It’s embedded in how educators “discipline” students, which books are read, whose images are on the walls, who is assigned to which courses, where teachers work, which opportunities are available, whose parents and histories are respected, and who is and isn’t supported to grow which skills. Every day, people in schools reproduce or passively enable [centuries of programming](#) in racist ideas about “types of people” and centuries of distributing opportunities unequally in racist ways. Today, in schools and districts, racism is present in any act or situation that, even unwittingly, tolerates, accepts, or reinforces racially unequal opportunities for children to learn and thrive; allows racial inequalities in opportunity as if they are normal and acceptable; or treats people of color as less worthy or less complex than “white” people.

And today, everyday antiracism can include all educators, youth and families in actively rejecting the false notions of group inferiority and superiority and related structures of unequal opportunity that are embedded in today’s society and our daily school lives.

While we read big ideas about antiracism, then — and join efforts to solve the crucial problem of racist policing — we also can learn to proactively ask ourselves and others whether the classrooms and schools we know sufficiently:

- reject false notions of human difference
- acknowledge lived experiences shaped along racial lines
- learn from diverse forms of knowledge and experience
- *****challenge systems of racial-class inequality.

In essence, we can learn to see all the relentless moments that white, English-speaking children disproportionately learn about opportunities and get them. And we can learn how to join *antiracist* efforts occurring in schools and districts as well, by considering all the ways we can publicly stand for belief in all people’s equal human value and potential and get involved in sharing, spreading, and making more necessary opportunities to learn.

To counter the anti-Blackness in our schools more specifically, we — whether we are educators, students, or

family members — can learn to join demands that educators stop “disciplining” Black students disproportionately ([the parallels with racist policing are numerous](#)), and placing Black students in Special Education disproportionately (and not in “gifted” education or advanced classes). By listening to Black students and parents, we can learn to refuse other routinized ways of devaluing, distorting, and just never really knowing Black children and families. We can learn to see and speak up about disparities in opportunity, and to ask schools and districts to address them. We can learn that diverse literature and diverse classrooms enrich the lives of all of us. White people can, most obviously, refuse immediately to say “the n word” in any form, or to pretend that racist comments are “jokes.”

Instead of fleeing from the term “white supremacy,” we can learn to counteract the white supremacy in our schools by *seeing*, then *questioning*, then *refusing*, all those moments when schools or districts funnel opportunities disproportionately to “whites” — when we treat “white” children, families, histories, and authors as more than or better, an “American” habit now centuries old. Whether we work in schools or attend them, we can join demands that all students get challenging learning experiences, instead of accepting schools or districts where such experiences are rationed only to some. We can learn to question normalized comments and classroom placements that mis-see and mis-treat children and families. We can learn to question and refuse the dangerous misinformation about intelligence and systems of tracking that treat white children disproportionately as “smarter.” We can learn to reject simplistic claims about other cultures we hear in school or at home, and instead start exploring people’s real experiences in specific contexts. We can learn to question racial patterns in who is labeled Special Ed, “at risk,” or “gifted” and given opportunities accordingly. We can support efforts to expand access to high-level courses. We can insist on learning about all students’ talents and actual lives in all communities. We can support teaching that is more engaging and relevant to lives. And when choosing schools in the first place, we can learn to treat school and classroom diversity as enriching, not threatening at all.

To be clear, such everyday antiracism also requires students, families, and educators to learn to join everyday action at the policy level. We can explore movements

seeking to use public dollars to fund school counselors instead of school police in our districts. We can join efforts to end the over-disciplining of Black youth. We can learn to support district-level efforts to have Ethnic Studies courses, to attract diverse staff, to replace “tracked” learning opportunities with broad access to rigor, and to expand the books children read. The protests have shown us that antiracism is also about individuals collectively reshaping systems in antiracist directions — and that change that supports Black people and other people of color actually supports white people, too.

In short, students, families, and educators can get in the habit of continually questioning: does this situation in my school or district pursue antiracism? Or does it replicate centuries-old patterns of treating “whites” as more valuable humans, rather than just equally human?

So this summer, while we read the amazing antiracist books and articles circulating and refuse racism in policing specifically, educators, students, and families can learn to join next steps to refuse racism in our schools and districts. I’ll brainstorm with anyone who contacts me (micapollock@ucsd.edu) about an antiracist idea you learned from books, or an antiracist project for your schools. I can point you toward the work of hundreds of education researchers.

Let’s keep climbing.

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