Hard Conversations on Cultural Responsiveness

Did She Really Just Say That?

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Why do we need to discuss cultural responsiveness?

- Cultural responsiveness has to do with our capacity as school staff to know and connect with the actual lived experiences, personhood, and the learning modalities of the students who are in our schools – not who USED to be in our school.
Percentage of Referrals by Race

- **AMER INDIAN OR ALASKA NAT**: 0.2% (0.5% of enrolled students, 0.2% of referrals)
- **ASIAN**: 3.1% (0.5% of enrolled students, 0.5% of referrals)
- **BLACK OR AFRICAN-AMERICAN**: 7.7% (14.0% of referrals)
- **HISPANIC**: 13.0% (10.9% of referrals)
- **MORE THAN ONE RACE**: 7.9% (7.2% of referrals)
- **WHITE (Non-Hispanic)**: 68.0% (67.0% of referrals)
- **NATIVE HAWAIIAN/PACISLANDER**: 0.2% (0.0% of referrals)
Why is it so hard to discuss?

We need to acknowledge....

- Race and culture are often difficult to talk about because our own beliefs and values come out
- Many of us have had experiences with conversations about race where the outcome wasn’t positive
- Having discussions involves taking a risk
- What is comfortable for us personally may not be comfortable for others
- People are afraid of how they will be taken
  - Whites fear sounding racists
  - Persons of color may feel it’s unsafe to voice their thoughts
So how do I try having those conversations?

- Start with your PBIS team and help them understand their own attitudes and bias regarding cultural competency before you assist staff with that issue
  - School leaders set the tone
  - With a smaller group you can ensure a safe place for having honest and courageous conversations where common understandings can be created
  - Present to your school staff as a cohesive team who understand each other better
  - Pay attention to your own tendencies when you’re in conversations. Are you defensive? Are you wanting to explain before a question is asked? Get nervous?
Help the team get ready for what staff will feel like with these conversations.

Do a cultural competency Self-assessment
We’re ready...now what?

- Set the tone for a safe environment
- Help them get in touch with their own beliefs

...listening requires not only eyes and ears but open hearts and minds. We hear through our beliefs. It is not easy but it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else and the only way to start the dialogue.

Lisa Delpit

(Author, Scholar, Director of Center for Urban Educational Excellence at Florida International University)
Tell the staff you’re going to have a dialogue

Dialogue is talking without defending and listening without judging. It’s saying what you want to convey and hearing what the other person is saying.

What is shared is spared
Diversity Discussion Starters

College of Agricultural Sciences at Penn State
http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/FreePubs/pdfs/ui377.pdf

A collection of 11 ice breakers designed to start conversations about diversity

Example – The Crayon Box That Talked
Conversations of cultural proficiency are on a continuum and your team or staff fall anywhere across the continuum.

“Thank you for calling the parents and explaining in Spanish about the field trip.”

“I think it’s interesting to look at another’s perspective through different lenses.”

“Make sure you do an activity for Black History month.”

“I’m not prejudiced. I don’t see color in my students.”

“Another generation to never leave the trailer park.”

“When we redistrict we can get rid of that neighborhood.”
If your school is having disproportionate discipline problems with students of color, a possible racial/cultural disconnection is the first thing you need to consider.

If you were to discuss this topic at your school, knowing you have staff along the continuum, how might it go over?
Roadmap for Negotiating Conversations

4 Agreements of Courageous Conversations

Courageous conversations is a strategy for breaking down racial tensions, and raising racism as a topic of discussion that allows those who possess knowledge on particular topics to have the opportunity to share it and those who do not have the knowledge to learn and grow from the experience.

Glenn E. Singleton & Cyndie Hays
Stay Engaged

- Give peers permission to stay engaged throughout the semester or year (talk, reflect, write, discuss with peers)

- “Can you tell me what you mean when you say...”
- “Is it possible for you to say more about...”
Experience Discomfort

- It’s okay and expected to feel discomfort
- Normalize the presence of multiple perspectives

- “Have the thoughts you shared been shaped by others, or is this your own personal perspective?”
Speak Your Truth

• Be honest about their feelings and opinions
• Some are afraid of offending, appearing angry or sounding ignorant so they fall silent and allow their beliefs and opinions to be misinterpreted or misunderstood.
• Many beliefs concerning race are based on misconceptions
Expect/Accept Non-Closure

- Conversations about race usually provide no resolution
- Courageous conversations will be on-going
- “Why do you think others might want to challenge your perspective?”
What I Leave With You Today