

## **Doing Anti-Bias Work With Whites Sharing Our Ideas & Experiences**

Editor's note: These are questions that were asked of several people in addressing the issue "How do we do effective anti-bias and anti-racism work with white people?"

### **Questions:**

1. What are your goals for white adults (staff, students, parents) and white children?
2. Describe the methods (activities) which have been particularly successful in engaging white adults.
3. What are frequently occurring issues or challenges?
4. What has been most rewarding for you in working with whites?
5. What has been most difficult for you in working with whites?
6. In a workshop, how would you answer this question: "I work in an all-white setting; how do I do anti-bias work with children?"
7. Do you team teach/present with a person of color? What are the dynamics? Do you team teach/present with a white person? What are the dynamics?

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#### **Question 1 - Goals:**

I work with many "good intentioned" white adults, in my work setting and in a diversity class I teach at Santa Rosa Junior College. My primary goal for well intentioned adults and teachers (which I believe most are) is to give information and experiences that will help them to open their eyes to the bigger picture of how racism effects each and everyone of us.

The majority believe strongly that racism and bias are wrong and express the idea that they shouldn't exist; but often have very little knowledge of how racism plays out in our society and how they participate in it on an everyday basis. The internal development of self

awareness of how we individually perpetuate racism is the primary goal.

Secondary goals are how to advocate against racist behavior; how to become an ally with people of color in the struggle against racism; and how to implement and advocate for anti-bias and/or multi-cultural education.

### **Question 2 -Methods/activities**

Often times white groups will hold the idea that multi cultural education is learning about others and not learning about themselves. Many have difficulty identifying with the word culture; "other people have culture, whites do not" is a common belief. Making diversity education "real" and "relevant" to whites is one strategy I strive to implement. This means starting where the group is, often times with information and experiences to explore culture, one's own culture and then to contrast one's culture with others' individual cultural heritage.

We can then begin to talk about group culture, "American culture," racism, other isms, and teaching methodologies. I see it as a sequence of learning; first learn about one's self and others in a cultural context, then information and learning about racism/other isms, and last, methods for working with children and families in educational settings.

### **Question 3 - Challenges:**

- ? The concept of having a culture that we operate from is often difficult for whites to grasp.
- ? The concept that one's values and belief are culturally based and not necessarily the "right" ones can be difficult.
- ? The concept of "white privilege" is very foreign to some people; they don't "feel" privileged in the conventional sense of the word. Conceptualizing how they benefit daily from having white skin is hard to grasp.
- ? Guilt and anger at one's race is a big issue, particularly as people begin to become more aware. Many times will try to separate from their racial group in an effort to become the "good" white, the one that doesn't think or feel in racist ways. Often times they begin to disassociate with whites and seek association and validation from people of color.
- ? Looking to people of color for validation and support rather than getting support from our own group. Realizing that racism is a "white" issue and knowing the issue can be worked on without consistently "checking in" with people of color for our validation.

**Question 4 - Rewards:**

Watching people increase their awareness of themselves, their culture and realizing how their actions impact their everyday life and the lives of others.

When adults say to me "I was just sitting there listening to what they were saying and I just had to speak up. I couldn't let that happen." Watching people grow and change in their personal process. For many, it's a life change and they can't entirely or naively go back to old ways of thinking and being.

**Question 5 - Difficulties**

Dealing with denial that there is racism and everyone participates in it. Justification and rationalizing for old ideas and beliefs that people want to hold onto. Confronting my own biases and prejudices when I come up against them. Dealing with individuals that come from the religious perspective "new Christian right" claiming they have the "right" answer for everyone.

**Question 6 - "I work in an all white setting; how do I do anti-bias work with the children?"**

Start where children are at. Teach similarities and differences amongst one another. Establish the basic concept of alike and different within your group and then begin to introduce new people, information and ideas.

Fill the environment with diversity and have diversity integrated into your overall curriculum. You have to create a diverse context for children to operate in and to learn from. Establish concept of fair and unfair within your group and then branch out to other situations exploring the same concept.

**Question 7 –Interracial teaming**

I have either presented with a person of color or by myself. When working with my partner, I have to be very aware of when and how I take the lead, push my ideas, who speaks first in the presentation, who speaks for how long, whether presentation time is equally distributed and how we model and talk about diversity.

Other dynamics generated from the people who are asking you to present: who the check is written out to, who is seen and contacted as the main presenter, who is seen as the helper. As a team, we talk about how we reinforce or confront these situations.

I know there are racist behaviors and overtones that we encounter within ourselves and others every time we work together. We have to constantly be willing to talk to each other about it, change it when needed and stay constantly aware, because it happens unconsciously much of the time because of who we are and the institutional racism umbrella we live under.

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