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Facilitating Difficult Race Discussions: Five Ineffective Strategies & Five Successful Strategies

By Derald Wing Sue, PhD, Wiley, February 16, 2022,

In this article, the author describes five ineffective “race talk” strategies that educators tend to use as a way of avoiding difficult conversations:

- do nothing,
- sidetrack the conversation,
- appease the participants,
- terminate the discussion, and
- become defensive.

Understanding why these strategies are ineffective is the first step to replacing them with effective strategies. Sue offers five effective strategies that are proven to allow positive outcomes to proliferate:

1. Understand your racial/cultural identity.
2. Acknowledge and be open to admitting your racial biases.
3. Validate and facilitate discussion of feelings.
4. Control the process and not the content of race talk.
5. Validate, encourage, and express admiration and appreciation to participants who speak when it feels unsafe to do so.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

1. What are some ways that you have successfully initiated conversations/debates about race? How do you know they were successful?

2. How can you use the five unsuccessful race talk strategies to open dialogue with colleagues about how to eliminate them and focus on those that are effective?

3. What are some strategies we can employ to foster racial dialogue and awareness within the school?
