Peaceful Practices conversation guide
A follow-up resource from the Peaceful Practices curriculum
to help congregations dialogue on sensitive topics.[1]

MCC

Critical Race Theory
How should race education be taught in schools?

Overview

This guide is intended to help facilitate healthy conversation while addressing the delicate aspects of this topic. Facilitators should keep in mind the following steps as they set up the conversation.

- Begin in prayer, together as a group.

- Go over the Peaceful Practices, which will help set the tone for the conversation. Make sure everyone can agree to engaging in the conversation while embodying these Peaceful Practices.

- Read through the content Introduction with everyone. This will help center the group around a shared language.

- Dive into the Conversation café in three rounds of sharing for 20 minutes each with small groups. See café set up instructions at the bottom of this conversation guide. When finished, open a brief plenary session for anyone to share highlights of their conversations with the larger group.

- End with the Closing blessing.

Gathering prayer

God of our lives,
We come together in your name, across spaces of difference.
Our stories and experiences often take us to different outcomes
of how to best represent your love in the world.
And yet, you love us each fiercely, and call us together.
Following Jesus' example, we seek a posture of openness and dialogue,
willing to listen deeply and learn from one another.
Bless us with the gifts of patience, kindness, humility and understanding.
May the power of your Holy Spirit draw us together,
moving us toward the humanity of one another,
rather than away from the opinions of the other.
We pray together in the name of
God our creator, Christ our reconciler and the Holy Spirit our comforter,
Amen.

Curiosity. Be curious, inviting diversity of ideas and opinions.

Discovery. Focus on what matters.

Engagement. Invite the best in yourself and others.

Dialogue. Listen together for insights and deeper questions.

Empathy. Seek to understand rather than persuade.

Authenticity. Speak from the heart, contributing your own thinking and experience.

Dignity. Consider power dynamics.

Transformation. Welcome creativity.

Introduction

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has become popularized as a catchall term to critique or support the ways racial equity is being taught in K-12 education. CRT was created in the mid-1970s as an academic framework that looks at the ways racism is embedded in U.S. legal systems and institutions. Though CRT is not explicitly taught in K-12 education, the framework, along with others, has informed approaches to race education in schools. For example, Critical Ethnic Studies considers how Black, Indigenous and people of color have historically been marginalized, examines current structures that perpetuate racism and encourages students to engage with these topics.

Recent controversy over how race education is being taught to children is evidenced by various legislative efforts across the U.S. In a number of states, bills have been introduced to remove or restrict the teaching of racism and racial equity in classrooms. Proposals include eliminating anti-racism education, restricting how the history of the U.S. is taught, teaching a more "traditional" or "patriotic" version of U.S. history, and requiring districts to grant parents the right of review for existing and new curricula.

Arguments in favor of rigorous race education contend that it offers a more transparent look at U.S. history and includes often-omitted stories from the perspective of marginalized people. Proponents suggest such education provides an important lens into understanding and bridging existing racial gaps in the U.S., and that it has positive and measurable outcomes for all students. Arguments against this kind of race education claim that it is un-American, divisive, or threatens the concept of individual merit as the basis of equality under U.S. law. Opponents also argue that race education can make white students feel uncomfortable, guilty or "bad."
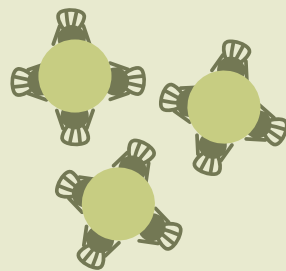
Conversation café instructions[2]

Arrange small tables around the room, with four chairs to a table. Include snacks and doodling materials to help create a relaxed and invitational atmosphere. Place P*eaceful Practices* table tents (**found here**) at each table to use as guidelines for engaging with one another. Invite participants to start at any table. Each small group should identify a person (called a table host) who will remain at the table for the duration of the dialogue. Initiate the first round of conversation with the "Personal experience" questions. Table hosts should invite everyone at the table to go around and respond to the question(s) as they wish, passing if they prefer. Questions are meant to spark conversation and do not all need to be addressed; use them as general guides. After everyone at the table has had a chance to speak, table hosts may open the conversation for impromptu dialogue. Invite participants to find new table groups for round 2, follow the same process and reflect on the "Exploring the topic" questions. Do this again for round 3 and use the "Reflecting on the conversation" questions. When the three rounds of table conversations are finished, open to the large group and ask for any reflections.

This resource is designed for in person conversation. Dialogue across significant difference of opinion and belief is hard. Creating an invitational space is important and pieces such as doodling materials, food and body language are challenging to replicate online. For groups that are unable to gather in person for dialogue, we recommend thinking creatively and intentionally to set up the best virtual conversation possible.

# Conversation café

Personal experience

- What do you value about the education you received as a young person? What do you believe was lacking in your education?

- How do you relate to education in your community? In what ways are you affected by what is taught in local K-12 schools?

Exploring the topic

- What Anabaptist or other Christian values underline your foundational beliefs about the way race and racism are taught in schools?

- What is the potential harm or benefit of using a framework such as CRT in race education? What outcomes do you expect with this approach? What outcomes do you expect with a more "traditional" approach?

- What are your greatest concerns, hopes and fears with regard to race education in the U.S.?

Reflecting on the conversation

- How has hearing other people's stories and perspectives shaped your understanding of the topic?

- What did you hear that was new today?

- As you listened together, where did you see overlap in underlying beliefs, values, feelings and needs?
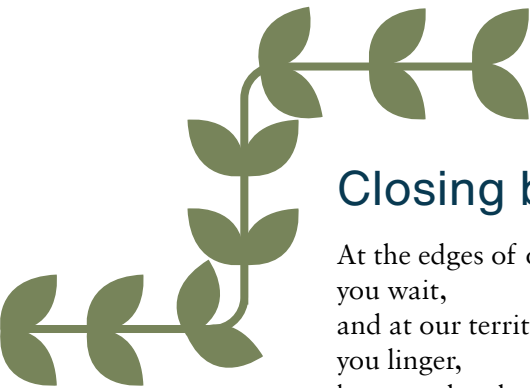
Closing blessing: At the Edges of Our Borders[3]

At the edges of our borders
you wait,
and at our territorial lines
you linger,
because the place where
we touch
beyond our boundaries
is where you take
your delight.

And when we learn to read
the landscape of our fears,
and when we come to know
the terrain of every sorrow,
then will we turn
our fences into bridges
and our borders
into paths of peace.

Follow-up

- Give us feedback! Please fill out this survey after you have engaged this conversation guide.
- Contact us at npjm@mcc.org if you would like to join the MCC U.S. National Peace & Justice Ministries mailing list or invite staff to engage your congregation.
- Donate.

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Endnotes

1. MCC's conversation guides do not reflect a specific theological or ideological stance of the organization, but rather provide guidance for how groups of different perspectives might have a healthy conversation together.

2. For more reading on the World Café method, see http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/.

3. "At the Edges of Our Borders" © Jan Richardson from *Night Visions: Searching the Shadows of Advent and Christmas*. Used by permission. janrichardson.com.