



Chapter 2

Unite Around Essential Terms

Excerpted from *Race, Class, and Culture: Constructive Conversations that Unite and Energize Your School and Community*, CampbellJones, Keeny, CampbellJones

You can mandate behavioral changes in authoritarian, command and control cultures. People will behave in prescribed ways, but their behavior will be compliance behavior, in response to an external source of authority. Compliance will last only as long as force is applied. And force most often fuels resistance and reinforces the attitudes and beliefs that it seeks to change. —Linda Ellinor and Glenna Gerard (1998, p. 222)

Many advocate for having courageous conversations about race (Ladson-Billings, 2016; Singleton, 2015; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Tatum, 2017), developing a deep understanding of the centrality of classism to maintain and advance poverty (Freire, 2000; Gorski, 2008), or gaining proficient skills to become culturally competent (Cross, 1989; Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, Terrell, & Lindsey, 2018).

To facilitate these worthy goals, it is essential that you willfully engage with others on an even platform using clear and appropriate terminology. Doing so ensures equal voice among participants, minimizing the power imbalances that can occur because of verbal advantage. We have observed, in many cases, dialogues that quickly spiral into debate marked with verbal and intellectual bullying, where some people with superior linguistic skills lay traps for those with lesser verbal skills. The result is conversation that is dominated by the biggest verbal bully on the block. We argue for accepting and opening horizons, which facilitates greater participation, particularly by voices often drowned out by fear.

For successful conversations, we need to have shared vocabulary. Deciding who establishes a definition is as important as the definition itself. It is our view that those participating in a group are best positioned to establish and extend definitions for group conversation. Consequently, it is essential that conversationalists entering cross cultural relationships establish agreed-upon definitions for sharing intimate details of their lifeworld experiences. How you perceive and experience life through social assignments such as ability, race, sexual orientation, or class profoundly affects how you enter authentic conversations in cross-cultural spaces. Identifying and understanding the definitions of words that are being used gives each participant common tools and parameters to safely navigate the space and shorten the perceived distance among perspectives. Having the proper means to facilitate language use has

the potential of enhancing shared understanding and ensures development of mutual perspectives.

The following terms and definitions are offered as an essential organizer for fruitful conversations. Common definitions of terms facilitate cross-fertilization of personal perspectives and group horizon expansion. As you read the proposed definitions, reflect on and compare the description with how you might use the term. You will use a structured framework to share your reflection at the seminar.

Directions:

1. Choose any two of the terms below that you would like to discuss at the seminar.
2. Note whether the meaning given affirms, helps clarify, or challenges your thinking.
3. Write a 2-4 sentence reflection about each of your two chosen terms. If helpful, use the following prompts:
 - ☐ Which term clarifies or aligns with your thinking and experiences? How so?
 - ☐ Which term challenges or conflicts with how you use the terms? How so?
 - ☐ Which term are you more curious to explore in more depth? Why?
4. **Bring your reflection and this document to the seminar on July 27.**

Ableism. Oppressive practices and dominant attitudes in society that devalue and limit the potential of people with perceived differences in abilities from those in the dominant group. Ableism is a set of practices and beliefs that assign inferior value (worth) to people who have special emotional, physical, or psychiatric needs. Ableist attitudes define these differences as inherently negative and assume that people with these perceived differences need to be “fixed.” Individuals classified as having special needs through the practice of ableism are viewed as deviant, inferior, and burdensome.

Culture. Values, assumptions, and beliefs that a group normalizes through their actions. Culture becomes the way things are consistently done, perhaps daily. It reflects the belief systems and behaviors informed by sociological factors like gender, age, sexual orientation, and physical ability. Over time, cultural behaviors become tradition that is handed down to the next generation.

Cultural Proficiency. Highlights the most ideal point on the cultural competence continuum developed by Terry Cross (1989), in *Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care*. It describes the policies and practices of an organization, or the values and behaviors of an individual, that enable cultural proficiency in a way that reflects how an organization treats its employees, its clients, and its community. This is the point on the continuum wherein sits equity.

Diversity. Diversity is a general term for indicating that many people with many different traits are present in an organization or group. Closely associated with diversity, is the term multicultural, referring to many cultures within the same grouping. Multicultural may refer to the sociodynamics of economics, power, privilege, class, ethnicity, race, language, gender, age, ability, or sexual orientation.

Equality. Equality speaks to equal treatment, or inputs, in the name of fairness based on the notion of a meritocracy. Regardless of social historical obstructions, this concept treats all people as the same without acknowledging differences such as age, gender, language, or ability. Equality without the practice of equity results in unfair, unequal outcomes that marginalize certain groups.

Equity. Equity speaks to the practice of fairness by ascribing to the realization “that the advancement of a small group cannot be achieved or sustained unless the larger population is allowed to share in the Unite Around Essential Terms 15 benefits” (Blankstein & Noguera, 2016, p. 60). Equitable programs make accommodations for differences so that the outcomes are the same for all individuals. The notion of equity challenges the belief in societal distribution of benefits. For example, some school districts give administrators and teachers five days of bereavement leave and noncertified personnel three days of bereavement leave. This is an unfair practice. Equality means everyone gets the same number of days. Equity means each person gets the number of days needed.

Politically Correct. A term used to describe language that reflects sensitivity to the diversity of a group, often without an understanding or caring about why such sensitivity is important. The intent of political correctness is to stay out of trouble. Politically correct responses are usually insincere and do not reflect an understanding of or concern for why a group makes a particular request (Lindsey et al., 2018, p. 166).

Key Terms for Conversation from: www.pbs.org/race

Race. A modern construct in human history. Race is a sociopolitical construct designed to divide populations based on certain biological features. In the United States and throughout the Americas, skin color is used as the determining factor for social and economic partitioning. Although race has no biological foundation, racism is real. For more information, see www.pbs.org/race.

Racism. Racism is a system of advantage based upon race (Wellman, 1993, cited in Tatum, 2017). In the United States and throughout the Americas, racial social advantage is given to people having the biological characteristic labeled white; people labeled of color are denied societal benefits based upon the amount of melanin in their body.

Tolerance. Resentful acceptance of differences with which a person disagrees or is unfamiliar. The perspective of tolerance moves minimally beyond attitudes of ethnocide or identity destructiveness that often marginalize or bar groups from receiving full societal benefits. Tolerance often marks an initial step from closed-mindedness toward inclusion.

Race justified social inequalities as natural. As the race idea evolved, white superiority became “common sense” in America. It justified not only slavery but also the extermination of Indians, exclusion of Asian immigrants, and the taking of Mexican lands by a nation that professed a belief in democracy. Racial practices were institutionalized within American government, laws, and society.

Race isn’t biological, but racism is still real. Race is a powerful social idea that gives people different access to opportunities and resources. The government and social institutions of the United States have created advantages that disproportionately channel wealth, power and resources to white people. This effects everyone, whether we are aware of it or not.

Colorblindness will not end racism. Pretending race doesn’t exist is not the same as creating equality. Race is more than stereotypes and individual prejudice. To combat racism, we need to identify and remedy social policies and institutional practices that advantage some groups at the expense of others.

Race is a modern idea. Ancient societies, like the Greeks, did not divide people according to physical distinctions, but according to religion, status, class or even language. The English language didn’t even have the word “race” until it turns up in 1508 in a poem by William Dunbar referring to a line of kings. Race has no genetic basis. Not one characteristic, trait or even gene distinguishes all the members of one so-called race from all the members of another so-called race.

During the seminar there is a protocol that you will follow. Following the structured protocol, consider these questions to deepen the dialogue.

“Why do you believe as you do about_____?”

“You stated_____. Why is that important to you?”

“What assumptions have you made about the term you chose?”

“What did you mean by_____?”

“What do you have in mind when you said_____?”

“Why do you think _____to be so?”

“Tell me more about_____”

“Give me an example of what you mean by...”

“Where or from whom did you learn_____?”

Ask only open-ended questions.