

The Myth of Colorblindness

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Recently I read a quote by a popular actor that troubled me. His words:

"The best way to stop racism today is to stop talking about it."

Interesting thought. Should we end poverty by not talking about it? Should we close the achievement gap by avoiding the topic? We could begin to change so much of what is wrong in our nation if we engaged in honest and courageous conversations about our biases, beliefs, and misconceptions. One of those misconceptions is the myth of *colorblindness*.

Colorblindness is the belief that we don't see color or race, that we see *people* and that we are all the same. These beliefs are widely held by wonderful and well intentioned people, including educators and school leaders. These are idealistic beliefs and there are a number of issues with this ideology:

We are beautifully diverse. Colorblindness negates our diversity, race and culture

We all see color and we all have biases. When we identify as colorblind, we are suppressing our authentic views and in the process, perpetuating systemic racism

Race matters. It impacts opportunities, education, and income in many ways

Colorblindness oppresses people of color. When you fail to see color, you fail to acknowledge the current narrative, a system of injustice for many non-white people

Why is the colorblind narrative popular?

For a few reasons. I believe it is easier to identify as colorblind than acknowledge differences that make us uncomfortable. This is easier for people to handle, especially in schools where we may lack the information and guidance to have difficult conversations about race. Another reason is simply not knowing...you don't know what you don't know. Many people also repeat what they've been taught and fail to reflect or question those beliefs. In the end, we don't realize how harmful the myth of colorblindness can be.

Why is this important in education?

When we work with children, we are responsible for their learning, social-emotional development, and overall well being. We are charged with developing healthy relationships

with our students and families. Part of this is embracing the gifts they bring to the classroom and using those diverse strengths to make learning more meaningful. This includes language, religion, culture, and race.

What can educators and ed leaders do to be color brave?

- Celebrate diversity! Acknowledge language, culture and race as strengths
- Build relationships with your students and connect with families
- Ask questions
- Engage in honest conversations with your colleagues and administrators. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable and not having all the answers
- Read and learn as much as you can about diversity and culturally responsive teaching. ASCD InService has useful resources: <http://inservice.ascd.org/14-resources-on-culturally-responsive-teaching/> Another great resource can be found at Tolerance.org Critical Practices for Anti-bias education: <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/critical-practices-for-antibias-education/classroom-culture>
- Provide culturally relevant student books. AmightyGirl.com has a great list of diverse books for children: <https://www.amightygirl.com/blog?p=13481>

It takes courage and practice to shift from a colorblind to a color BRAVE ideology. If we want to challenge racism and begin a wave of change in our country it must begin in schools with children and educators. Our students, all students, need you to lead this change. I hope this post inspires you to do so.

"In order to get beyond racism, one must first take race into account. There is no other way." -Harry A. Blackmun

References:

Hobson, Melody (2014). Color Blind or Color Brave? TED talk

Williams, Monica, PhD. (2011). Colorblind Ideology is a Form of Racism. Psychology Today

Crisis Leadership: 10 Guiding Principles

Leading through a crisis is one of the most difficult things a leader will do in her career. Leading successfully through a crisis is an even greater challenge and a monumental accomplishment. Nothing has prepared us for the demands of the COVID19 pandemic and school closures, the complexity of crisis leadership, and the devastating impact on our students. The impact goes beyond teaching and learning, and into the wellness and mental health of students, staff and families. This impact inspires us to lead to the best of our abilities. And for many, it keeps us up at night.

These past few weeks have made something abundantly clear to me: Leadership matters.

Yes, we've talked about the impact of great leadership for years. We've read and written about it, and perhaps shared (1 or 100) inspirational quotes about how much it matters. I thought I understood what it takes to be a great leader, but nothing NOTHING prepared me for crisis leadership.

Crisis leadership commands that I lead in a d...

Understanding the Benefits of a Student's Home Language- as shared in EdWeek Q&A with Larry Ferlazzo

This post was originally posted in Education Week, Classroom Q&A with Larry Ferlazzo, 1/31/17

Question: What is the role, if any, of an ELL student's home language in the classroom?

“It is hard to argue that we are teaching the whole child when school policy dictates that students leave their language and culture at the schoolhouse door” (Cummins, 2005)

The number of English Learners has dramatically increased over the last two decades. Current research indicates an extraordinary boom in our English learner student population in the United States. The U.S. Department of Education estimates that 4.5 million English learners are enrolled in public schools across the U.S. (CDE, 2016). The growth is evident across the nation, but especially in California where “...one of every four students is an English learner” (Goldenberg, 2010). For many educators, English language learners ARE the majority student population in our schools. Clearly, educators have the responsibility of addressing ...