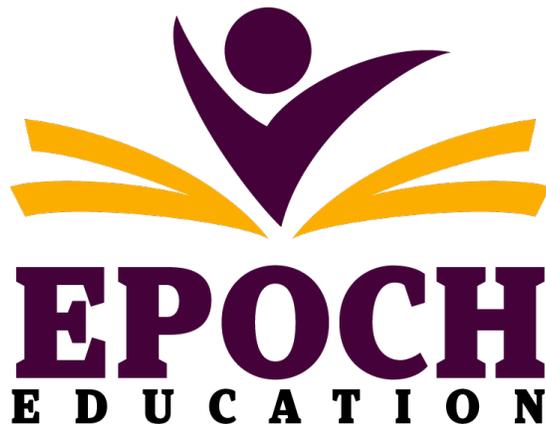# Mindful Whiteness

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Marin Community Foundation

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Embracing Culture – Cultivating Competence

For over 20 years, Kelly Cole has woven together her experience as a community educator and advocate, group facilitator, ceremonialist, pre-school teaching assistant, nanny and musician to create safe spaces where adults, young people and children can experience and express themselves as empowered beings in the world.

Her background includes work as a Patient Advocate and Educator at a women's health clinic in Ohio, as a Community Education Coordinator for Alternatives for Girls (an award-winning program serving homeless and underserved girls and young women in Detroit) and as a Community Education Coordinator and Facilitator for Planned Parenthood of Southeast Michigan.

As well as creating her own workshops for adults, families, children and teenagers, she currently sits on the board of the non-profit, Empowerment4Girls. As an equity trainer with Epoch Education, she supports the work staff, educators and administrators are doing to provide equitable education opportunities that nurture and encourage the potential and brilliance of children of color and other marginalized students.

DEVELOPING A POSITIVE WHITE IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION

In the struggle for racial justice I think we need to be clear about what we as white people want. We might ask ourselves: What are the goals we are trying to achieve? As the school of Non-Violent Communication would say, what are our real needs?

As white people many of us want justice and an end to racial oppression. We want to live our full humanity. We want to live in right relationship with all people. But it is difficult for us to live our full humanity when the unearned privileges of white skin color come at the expense of others. So it is in my self interest as a white person to find a different way of being white in the world.

Coming back to an earlier observation, historically whiteness and white supremacy pervade our culture, our institutions, and our personal relationships with people of color. We are socialized by white institutions and we internalize white superiority. One of the difficult challenges we face as white people is to **identify a positive way of being white** while recognizing we live in a culture based on white supremacy.

For me to affirm my whiteness in a culture of white superiority I may end up affirming or supporting white supremacy. But I abhor white superiority and all it stands for.

I want to have a racial identity that is not based on the oppression of people of color. I want a racial identity that is not based on the deification of whiteness or white supremacy. I know that I can't reject my white skin color – I can't take off my white skin. And white society will continue to give me unearned privilege. The challenge I face as a white person is to feel good about being white without asserting that as a white person I am superior to other people, or oppressing people of color.

Janet Helms writes "The task for whites is to develop a positive white identity based on reality not on assumed superiority. In order to do that each person must become aware of his or her whiteness, accept it as personally and socially significant, and learn to feel good about it. Not in the sense of Klan members "white pride" but in the context of a commitment to a just society." (Quoted in Beverly Tatum Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting together in the Cafeteria Table? P.94")

Here are some steps we think we can take to enable us to move in that direction. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but a starting point for further reflection.

- Be an accountable ally to People of Color.
- Work to change racist institutions.
- Learn to live as multi-racial people.
- Take responsibility for our own racial identity journey.
- Learn the truth about the racist history of our country.
- Nurture a positive anti-racist white identity in children.
- Build a White anti-racist collective.
- Honor our heritage of white anti-racist resistors.

RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN WHITE PEOPLE

"The task for Whites is to develop a positive White identity based in reality, not on assumed superiority. In order to do that each person must become aware of his or her Whiteness, accept it as personally and socially significant, and learn to feel good about it, not in the sense of a Klan member's "White pride," but in the context of a commitment to a just society." (Dr. Janet Helms as quoted in Beverly Tatum, Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting together in the Cafeteria? p. 94.)

In her book Black and White Identity Development: Theory, Research and Practice (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1990) Janet Helms proposes the following theory of identity development for white people.

CONTACT OR PRE-ENCOUNTER Whites internalize the messages of the dominant society. Whites learn that being white is "normal" and being white makes one superior to people in other racial groups.
Examples:
DISINTEGRATION (ENCOUNTER) Events and/or relationships begin to make white children, adolescents, or adults aware of the reality of racism. Racism becomes visible. This often brings discomfort.
Examples:
REINTEGRATION The pressure to conform to the norms of the society is strong. Acting against racism may have costs. There is a tendency to slip backwards, often blaming the victims of racism or their life circumstances. Whites will also attempt to distance themselves from the white collective saying "But I am an individual." Or "I don't do those things!" They may choose to identify with some other marginalized group.
Examples:

PSEUDO-INDEPENDENCE

Beginning to understand institutional and cultural racism, but not yet sure about what to do about it or how to be an effective ally to people of color in the struggle for racial justice.

Examples:

IMMERSION/EMERSION

Surrounding oneself with positive white anti-racist people and symbols; learning about white antiracist history and identity.

Examples:

AUTONOMY

Separating from the values of white supremacy. Being willing to engage in anti-racism efforts in solidarity with people of color and other white anti-racist allies.

Examples

Anti-Bias Education: The Power of Social-Emotional Learning

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How is social and emotional learning (SEL)--which is now an established and critical part of the school experience--connected with anti-bias education? If we want to help young people understand bias and work on social justice, what does SEL bring to the table?

According to Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), social and emotional learning is "the process through

which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions."

SEL Competencies

CASEL outlines these core SEL competencies:

- Self-awareness: The ability to recognize one's emotions and thoughts and reflect on their influence on behavior, including the ability to assess strengths and limitations and possess a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.

- Self-management: The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts and behaviors effectively in different situations including managing stress and impulses and motivating oneself to work towards and achieve goals.

- Social awareness: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures and understand social and ethical norms for behavior.

- Relationship skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups which includes skills in communication, listening, cooperation, negotiating conflict constructively, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.

- Responsible decision making: The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, consequences and the well-being of self and others.

The term "social and emotional learning" was popularized in 1995 with the publication of Daniel Goleman's book Emotional Intelligence, though the term was actually coined several years before by Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer. SEL gained prominence after the 1997 publication of Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators.

Several hundred experimental, control-group studies have documented the positive effects of SEL programming on children of diverse backgrounds from preschool through high school. Such programs have been shown to improve students' social skills, reduce aggression and behavior problems, improve attendance and academic performance, and reduce depression. They have also been shown to improve the classroom climate for learning. CASEL has compiled descriptions of SEL programs that have proven to be most effective.

Over the past twenty years, educators have developed a wide variety of approaches and programs that come under the umbrella of SEL including: character education, conflict resolution and peer mediation, restorative justice and other alternatives to punitive discipline/suspension, bullying prevention, school climate work and more. Some of these do include explicit instruction on bias and social justice.

Anti-bias education

Anti-bias education is a distinct field. It is a comprehensive approach to help young people learn to actively challenge stereotyping, bias and all forms of discrimination. Anti-bias mastery skills include: understanding the various dimensions of identity; learning and applying basic terms relating to bias and discrimination; increasing understanding of the impact of culture and differences on communication; and recognizing, acknowledging and confronting bullying, bias and discrimination in themselves, others and within institutions.

Given the public conversation about bias and injustice--especially recently--several prominent national education organizations including the NEA, AERA, NCTE and AFT have called for addressing equity in schools and society, specifically recommending that educators and school leaders "receive the tools, training, and support they need to build curricula with substantive exploration of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination."

Anti-bias education and social and emotional learning intersect in a variety of ways.

Intra- and interpersonal relationship skills

As we introduce young people to sometimes delicate concepts like identity, diversity, stereotyping and bias, they will need SEL skills as the foundation for having those conversations in a productive way. In order to open up and discuss difficult topics, children need to feel safe and respected in their classrooms. They need to be able to communicate effectively to convey their point of view and understand what others are saying in words and body

language. They need an expanded feelings vocabulary for the different emotions that may emerge when they interact with anti-bias material in the classroom and it will be useful to have productive ways to deal with those feelings. Finally, they need to learn how to work, learn and play collaboratively in small and large groups and among differences.

Social awareness and empathy

Empathy and perspective taking are key components of social and emotional learning. Being able to understand the perspective of different people and empathizing with their life's situations and struggles helps students accept differences and gain insight into how bias and discrimination impact different people. Empathy and perspective taking motivate students to take the next step and do something about the injustice they see in their world. We know that giving students skills and knowledge in bias and bullying are not enough--empathy and understanding are critical to get young people to want to make change, help other people or inspire them to be an ally.

## Identity-Based Teasing, Name-Calling and Bullying

There are many SEL programs that focus on social relationships between young people which explore friendship, cliques, name-calling and bullying. Biased or identity-based bullying, when a person gets bullied because of bias based on an aspect of their identity (i.e. race, religion, sexual orientation, physical appearance, gender identity/expression, etc.), is all too common in school and especially in the teenage years. Therefore, helping students explore identity and bias are very important components of being

able to confront identity-based bullying.

Responsible decision making

SEL aims to help young people understand that we all need to take responsibility for ourselves and others - including our school, community, country and world. When we see an injustice, it is especially important that we take action as global citizens. This reinforces the goal of anti-bias education: to teach young people that despite the injustice in the world, we can all make a difference and that throughout history, people working together have created change through activism and legislation and by changing people's hearts and minds.

"Anti-bias education is a distinct field. It is a comprehensive approach to help young people learn to actively challenge stereotyping, bias and all forms of discrimination." 🐦 f
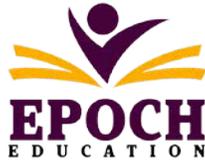
RIR PROTOCOL

Recognize It:

The objective is to get participants to question what they think, feel and believe about the statements. Three standard questions should be considered to prompt the conversation. Answering any one of these will get the conversation started.

1. What do I think about when I hear this statement?
2. How do I feel when I hear it?
3. What is my initial belief about the statement?

Interrupt It:

The objective is to practice using a series of targeted questions to dig deeper about the thought/feeling/belief and counter the statement thoughtfully to "interrupt" the dialogue in a compassionate manner.

Sample "Interruptions" might include: Tell me more….; share a personal story that offers a different perspective; or share how the statement made you feel when you heard it.

Repair It:

The objective is to come up with actionable steps that people can do to repair and broaden their awareness and understanding as related to the statement. Listed are three things individuals can do to "Repair It."

Observe: What situation can you seek out and/or view that can help deepen your understanding of the situation?

Engage: What situation can you seek and/or what dialogue with specific people/professions/races etc. can you have to understand the varying perspective?

Read: What specific authors, books or categories of information can you research to expand your knowledge?

RIR PROTOCOL ACTION PLAN

Recognize it….

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Interrupt it….

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Repair it….

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____