



How do race and racism connect with science learning in early childhood and elementary classrooms?

What Is The Issue?

Early childhood and elementary [educators play a critical role in confronting historical and ongoing racial injustices, especially within science learning contexts.](#)

. Science has been and continues to be complicit in perpetuating systems of oppression against racially and intersectionally marginalized communities. However, scientific knowledges, practices, and learning experiences can also [contribute to more just and thriving possibilities](#) for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) youth. Conversations and learning engagements centering race can and should begin in the early childhood and elementary years.

WHY IT MATTERS TO YOU

- **Educators** should engage in reflection about their own racialized experiences, identities, beliefs, and teaching practices, and create opportunities for justice-centered, age-appropriate conversations and explorations of race, racism, and racial justice.
- **District Staff & PD Providers** should make resources and spaces available for early childhood and elementary educators to practice facilitating learning about race in their classrooms.
- **Educational Leaders** should cultivate school-wide commitments to racial justice learning as relevant and essential to all subject areas, including science.

Things To Consider

- Everyone within educational systems should commit to anti-racist learning and practices across their roles and responsibilities.
- Race and racism are present in science classrooms. Students, [no matter how young, are aware of race](#), and [mirror societal biases](#). They notice who is in the room both literally (you and other students) and figuratively ([Who does science? What does a scientist look like?](#)).
- PK-5 educators developing an [anti-racist pedagogy](#) may fear talking about race with young children. However, our students are [ready and willing to have these conversations](#), no matter how young they are. Discussions about race are not only integral to science teaching, but also necessary for holistic, rigorous science education and intellectual and civic health. Here's [how one teacher talks with her students about race](#), and here's [another resource for navigating these conversations](#).
- Youth of color, especially BIPOC children, want to [see themselves and their communities in STEM](#). Explicitly teaching a wider representation of the [global majority doing STEM work](#) allows students to see themselves as scientists and engineers. Teaching science through a [color-evasive lens](#) and avoiding these conversations can perpetuate false narratives of who engages in science and engineering.

Recommended Actions You Can Take

- Learn more about what [anti-bias](#) and [anti-racist](#) learning with young children can look like in practice.
- Work to recognize when questions and comments relate to race and resist the urge to avoid these conversations. [Follow children's lead and engage with the questions they raise](#). Their curiosities about race, racism, and fairness can be leveraged for shared learning and connected to scientific phenomena and inquiry.
- Incorporate discussion of race, racism, and racial justice into routine everyday learning that already occurs in your classroom, including [science investigations, engineering projects, shared reading of age-appropriate books, math, social-emotional learning, outdoor play and learning, and the arts](#). [Consistent integration of racial justice topics](#) supports children's agency and their commitments to justice and care.
- Explore how [culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining science instruction](#) can provide opportunities for students of diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and racial backgrounds to access scientific knowledge and practices while also inviting their knowledge and that of their community into science learning. Work from the assumption that [taking up cultural approaches to science teaching is complex, ongoing work that is worth the effort](#).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How are you building an anti-racist learning community in your early childhood or elementary classroom? Who can you build it with?
- How are you supporting young learners' sense of belonging, agency, empowerment, and self-determination with regard to issues of racial justice?

Attending to Equity

- Working for racial justice as a teacher of young children requires placing [equity at the heart of STEM education](#). This is lifelong work that cannot be completed like a checklist.
- Begin by considering how you likely have been socialized or taught to [engage with or avoid talking about race and racism](#). Consider how your own story shapes your ideas about what is possible in a race-conscious early childhood or elementary community.
- Next, consider how your local school community has engaged with or avoided talking about race and racism. There is no universal playbook for talking about racism. Because [different communities have particular histories](#) of racism, anti-racist pedagogies should adapt to and engage with specific communities and contexts.
- Look for opportunities to connect with and amplify other [anti-racist](#) and [anti-oppressive movements](#), such as those that center [Black](#) and [Indigenous communities](#).

ALSO SEE STEM TEACHING TOOLS:

- #54 [Equitable Community](#)
- #67 [Justice-Centered Phenomena](#)
- #71 [Science Ed Equity Projects](#)
- #79 [Systemic Racism & Science Ed.](#)

