

Future First Education

Equitable Teaching Closing the Divide

Courageous Conversations

Britta Livengood

Having conversations about race can be difficult. Many times when people engage in race-related conversations on social media it ends at an impasse in which no progress is possible. Most people believe they cannot engage in such conversations with others if they don't see eye-to-eye. Glenn E. Singleton would argue that these conversations *are* possible, and that it just takes effort to approach them in a different way.

Singleton is the author of *Courageous Conversations About Race*, and founder of the award-winning protocol for effectively engaging, sustaining, and deepening interracial dialogue. He has created a compass to help people navigate where they are on their journey through racism. We cannot eliminate racial achievement disparities unless we have the tough conversations about race, and Singleton's compass is a powerful tool to guide us through this dialogue.



Glenn E. Singleton, author of *Courageous Conversations*

The Courageous Conversations Compass includes four quadrants; believing, thinking, feeling and acting. The idea behind the compass is to first approach the conversation and determine where you fall on the compass. It is important to have self awareness about where you are at

Upcoming FFE Circle Time Broadcasts



May 4
Including Families in Antiracism Efforts at School
8:30 pm EST



June 15
Learning About Racial Justice Without Burdening & Tokenizing POC
8:30 pm EST

the start of this conversation. Once you understand yourself, you can meet others where they fall on the compass and respond appropriately. It won't help to present facts to someone in the emotional quadrant, and it won't help to give an emotional argument to someone who is in the intellectual quadrant. After you have determined the quadrant that each individual falls under, the final goal is working together to reach the center.

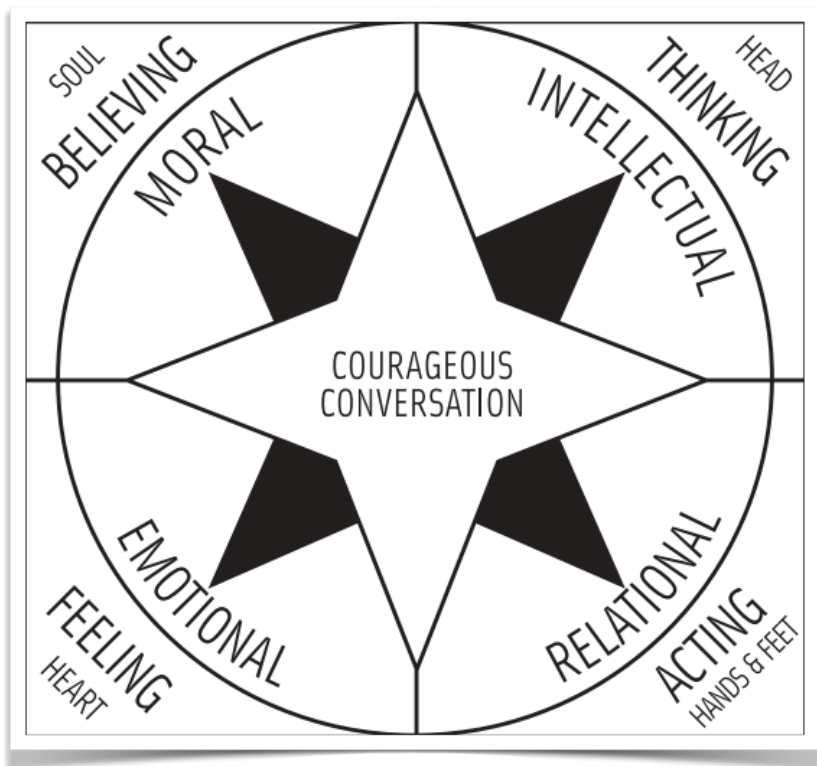
Each individual will react to an event or conversation in a different way. Some may have strong emotional reactions, leaving feelings of anger, sadness, or frustration. Some may have strong moral reactions feeling that a situation is at odds with their core beliefs. Others may have intellectual responses, asking questions or contemplating new ideas. Lastly, some may have a relational or actioned response, involving petitions, protests or advocacy. When you practice using the compass on a regular basis you begin moving to the center so you are in touch with all four quadrants.

As an effective tool that leads to more productive conversations about race, Singleton's compass is an effective resource that educators can use in many situations.

Morning Meeting

Conversation Starters: Using the compass to start a morning meeting is a great way for students to express where they are at the beginning of each day. It also introduces them to the tool so they are comfortable using it with any tough conversations that arise in the classroom regarding race. Post a compass in your room for students to view, and provide sentence starters they can use.

Parent Teacher Conferences: These conferences can be difficult for both parents and teachers. It's important to note where each individual falls on the compass before starting the meeting. Often, teachers are presenting facts and information about academics or behavior, putting them in the intellectual quadrant. Parents may not be able to meet the teacher in this quadrant if they are nervous, frustrated, or upset. Understanding that the parent may be in the emotional quadrant can help everyone to achieve a consensus or reach a final goal.

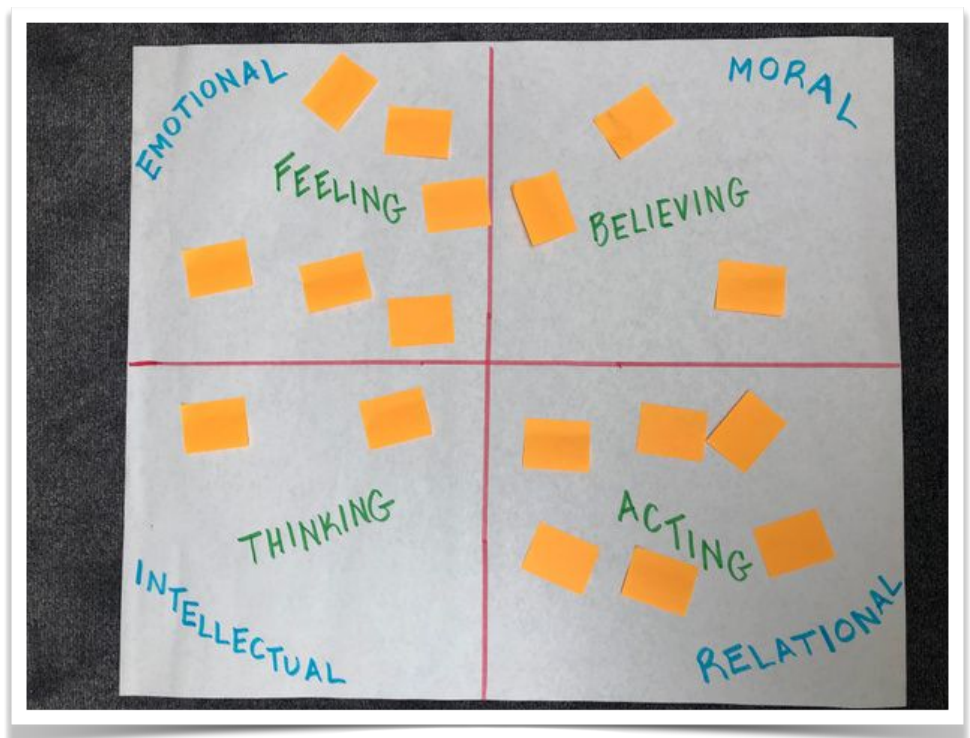


The Courageous Conversations Compass by Glenn E. Singleton

Daily Communication with Students: It is difficult to watch capable students give up or refuse to engage. Before getting frustrated with a given student, pull them aside to ask where they fall on the compass.

Students may not be able to join the intellectual quadrant if they are facing an emotional or moral dilemma.

Each of us has a strong suit on the compass, and it's imperative that we learn others' strengths as well. These courageous conversations are essential in ending racism.



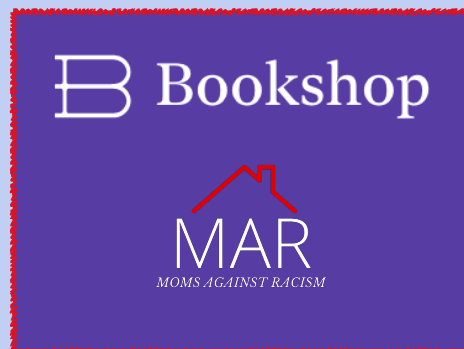
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Sources: Singleton, Glenn E. **Courageous Conversations About Race: a Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools**. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin, A SAGE Company, 2015.

Courageous Conversations. 2021, "Courageous Conversations About Race." Pacific Educational Group. <https://courageousconversation.com/about/>

Teacher Spotlight

Asha Vasudeva

Each month, FFE spotlights a teacher who excels at cultivating inclusion or antiracism in their classroom. This month, Asha Vasudeva shared some insight.

FFE: How long have you been teaching and what grades do you teach?

AV: I teach elementary special education. I co-teach ELA and Math for 4th grade and work one-on-one with kindergarten students. This is my first year with my own classroom! I was a long term sub last year. Prior to that, I was a paraprofessional (one-on-one aide for special needs students) for 3 years.

FFE: What's your favorite way to cultivate diversity, inclusion, or anti-racism in your classroom?

AV: I love incorporating books into my classroom. Resources such as NewsELA are also wonderful. They provide kids with appropriate news articles about current events in the world. For example, my students read an article about how Kamala Harris paved the way for Black women, and that having her as our Vice President is a really big deal. They loved it! We have read books about different individuals of many races and ethnicities, giving students a chance to see how people of other races have impacted history and current events in our country. During Black History Month, my students learned about a new individual each day. They got to present their facts to their teachers at the end of each day. The students were very engaged in this activity.

I read a lot of different books to my younger students. I make a big effort to find books that portray all types of children (different races, different abilities, etc). With younger students, I believe that it is important for them to be around children who may look differently than they do. I think that it makes them much more tolerant individuals. When I worked as a paraprofessional aide, I worked with several completely non-verbal students who were in the general education classroom. The other students in the classroom were very accepting of these students because they had not learned any differently. It was a wonderful experience to see how they interacted with these students who had different abilities than they did.



FFE: What advice do you have for teachers who are just starting out when it comes to prioritizing inclusion or anti-racism?

AV: It can be difficult for teachers to know where to start. I definitely recommend ensuring that teachers have a diverse library in their classroom. Reading books and hearing stories of people who are different than they are is extremely educating and important for children. Another great resource, depending on your school district, is to see what your district offers for teachers (professional development, seminars, etc). The most important part is for teachers themselves to be aware and educated so that they may appropriately introduce these topics to their students. Sometimes parents will not agree with everything their child is exposed to, but it is important to voice your position (all are welcome, all are included, all should be treated equally), and stick to that. It may feel like a daunting task because it is a big one, but it is so important. Another great resource would be to talk to other teachers in your building and see what ideas they have.

FFE: What is your favorite book?

AV: This is a tough question! I absolutely love to read. Throughout the past few years, I have made a big effort to read important and educational books so that I am more aware and informed.

Here are some of my favorites for adults:

- *Becoming* by Michelle Obama (if you haven't read, you need to, it's a masterpiece).
- *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates

Some favorites for young adults and kids:

- *Dear Martin* and *Dear Justyce* by Nic Stone
- *Punching the Air* by Ibi Zoboi and Yusuf Salaam
- *Ghost Boys* by Jewell Parker Rhodes
- *The Hate U Give* and *Concrete Rose* by Angie Thomas
- *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *I Am Enough* by Grace Byers

*Nominate a teacher by emailing Britta at brittalivengood@gmail.com.

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Four Agreements with Courageous Conversations

When establishing a classroom environment for courageous conversations there are four agreements that all individuals participating in the conversation need to adhere to.

- **Stay engaged:** Staying engaged means “remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue.”
- **Experience discomfort:** This norm acknowledges that discomfort is inevitable, especially with students in a dialogue about race. Participants should make a commitment to bringing issues into the open. It is through dialogue, even when uncomfortable, that healing and change can begin.
- **Speak your truth:** This means being open about thoughts and feelings, and not just saying what you think others want to hear.
- **Expect and accept non-closure:** This agreement asks participants to sit in uncertainty and not rush to a quick solution, especially in relation to racial understanding. That requires an ongoing dialogue.

WORD WATCH: MICROAGGRESSION

Microaggressions are a comments or actions that negatively target a marginalized group of people, and are a form of discrimination. They can be subtle insults or put-downs. These comments could be based on race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Although some can be intentional, they are often said or done without meaning harm or insult. The person may not even realize they are making a microaggressive comment or behavior. It is more obvious if someone is being discriminatory by using a racial slur or telling a racist joke, but microaggressions can be harder to identify.

Here are some examples of microaggressions:

- “I didn’t expect you to be so articulate” to a person of color suggests that people of color are not as educated as white people.
- “Your name is so hard to pronounce”. This gives the impression that a person does not fit in culturally or linguistically.
- “Is that your real hair?” Many black women in particular are often discriminated against for their natural hair. Some have even been told it is “unprofessional” compared to smooth hair.

Microaggressions can make someone feel different, unsafe or violated. It’s important to educate ourselves on the impact of using harmful language and chair any inappropriate behavior.



Sources: Smith, Anna. “What to Know About Microaggressions.” Medical News Today. 11, June 2020. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/microaggressions>

Ward, Marguerite and Rachel Premack. “What is a Microaggression?.” Insider. 1, March 2021. <https://www.businessinsider.com/microaggression-unconscious-bias-at-work-2018-6>