

Future First Education

Equitable Teaching Closing the Divide

March Madness: Skin in the Game

Britta Livengood

As March approaches so does the annual NCAA March Madness competition between 68 college basketball teams. Brackets are created, and the conversations among students about their favorite teams begin as well. Students watch teams get picked off one by one, calculating the wins and losses on their brackets. It's narrowed down to the Sweet Sixteen, the Elite Eight, the Final Four and then the final championship game.



While students watch the games they also hear commentary from announcers. They mainly discuss the plays as well the skills and abilities players demonstrate. These comments can play a huge role in how students view the players.

In 2019, Steven L. Foy and Rashawn Ray decided to take a closer look at comments being made during games based on individual players' skin color. Foy and Ray collected data from 54 NCAA basketball tournament games from 2000-2010. They watched videos, transcribed audio of in-game announcers, and coded every comment about each player, during each game. They sorted nearly

Upcoming FFE Conversations



March 9

Classroom Management when Teaching about Antiracism
8:30 pm EST



April 6

Helping Students Understand Cultural Appropriation
8:30 pm EST

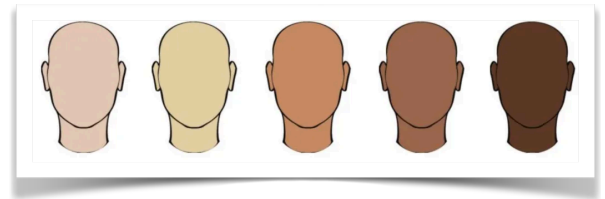


May 4

Learning about Racial Justice Without Burdening & Tokenizing POC
8:30 pm EST

2,700 comments according to performance, physical attributes, and mental characteristics of players.

Foy and Ray then collected pictures of each of the over 400 players from the rosters and placed them into five skin-tone quintiles (as shown in the graph to the right).



After analyzing the data it became clear that stereotypes about skin tone and race play a significant role in how commentators describe players during games.

Foy, Steven and Rashawn Ray. 2019. "Skin in the Game: Colorism and the Subtle Operation of Racial Stereotypes in Men's College Basketball." *American Journal of Sociology* 125(3): 730-785.

The data showed that lighter-skinned players were typically credited for their performance (shooting, rebounding, steals) as well as their mental abilities and "strategic thinking" in the game (craftiness, cleverness, control of the ball). Darker-skinned players were more likely to be described for their physical characteristics (athleticism, speed, strength). Commentators often credited the size and height of darker-skinned players for their plays, instead of the players themselves for any type of mental strategy they may have used.

The implications of light-skinned players having a more strategic, logical game play and dark-skinned players having a more physical, athletic one has significant ramifications. Professional NBA teams want players who can think strategically while also having strong physical abilities. If only one of those attributes is being represented, some players may be overlooked.

This could also have a negative effect on students who watch these tournaments every year. Darker-skinned students may believe the only way they can be a proficient athlete is based on physical abilities instead of how crafty, clever and in control they are. White students may erroneously learn to view players of color as entertainers who shouldn't do or say anything that could potentially make spectators uncomfortable.



As teachers, where do we go from here?

1. Continually encourage students on their mental and strategic abilities, in and out of the classroom.
2. Instead of praising students on grades, praise them for the progress they made.
3. Pick Black athletes and explain how they used some form of strategic thinking, even if commentators didn't mention it.
4. Explain to students how much math and science are used in a basketball game (e.g. calculating distance on the court, work vs. not work, kinetic and potential energy), and how much of a mental game basketball really is for players.
5. For an English lesson, allow students to do their own commentary for a basketball game, giving them specific vocabulary to use (e.g. craftiness, sagacious, erudite), encouraging them to note strategic game play.

Stereotypes about white physical inferiority and Black intellectual inferiority are pervasive in 21st-century America. With the amount of viewers that March Madness receives we need to address implicit biases, especially for our darker-skinned students who we know are worth more than just their physical stature.

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Teacher Spotlight

Anjalee Beverly

Each month, TC spotlights a teacher who excels at cultivating inclusion or antiracism in their classroom. This month, Anjalee Beverly shared some insight.

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

AB: 12 years

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

AB: I cultivate diversity and inclusion by reading books reflective of all cultures. This includes keeping my classroom library well stocked with culturally responsive books. I also allow my students and their families to be the experts and have them teach the class about their heritage and traditions.

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

AB: My advice for new teachers is always build relationships with students and families before prioritizing content.

FFE: What is your favorite book?

AB: My favorite children's book is *Lisa Lou and the Yeller Belly Swamp* by Mercer Mayer. I also really love *Islandborn* by Junot Diaz.

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



“I allow students and their families to be the experts, and have them teach the class about their heritage and traditions.”

Meet Miguel Cardona

President Biden recently selected Dr. Miguel Cardona as the new secretary of the Department of Education. Here are some important things you should know about him.

- Cardona spent two decades as a public school teacher and administrator.
- After that he became the education commissioner of Connecticut's public school system.
- He has been a fierce advocate for Connecticut's most vulnerable children, including those with disabilities, low-income families, and English language learners.
- A recent quote from Cardona states, "We have to accelerate our efforts because COVID accelerated disparities."
- The work for his \$68 billion-budget will go to implementing policies for federal financial aid, collecting and disseminating data on America's schools, prohibiting discrimination, and ensuring equal access to education.
- He wants to expand access to community colleges, training, and public four-year colleges and universities to improve student success and grow a strong, more prosperous, and more inclusive middle class.
- He is not Betsy DeVos.

WORD WATCH: ALLYSHIP

Allyship is the state or condition of being an ally. It involves being proactive, ongoing learning, and potentially unlearning and reevaluating what you believe about people of color and racism. It is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals or groups of people. Here are some important reminders for allies.

1. Allyship is not an award. The work is not self-seeking or self-gratifying.
2. Being an ally works from a place of solidarity, not identity.
3. Allyship is not a performance. It's easy to voice your opinion on social media these days, but allies don't represent or speak for marginalized groups. We can speak to others in our own group about ways to work toward solidarity and hold space for otherwise marginalized voices to speak.



Sources: Rochester Racial Justice Toolkit. "What is Allyship?". Rochester Racial Justice Toolkit. 2016. <https://thetoolkit.wixsite.com/toolkit/beyond-allyship>

Ward, Marguerite. "An Anti-Racist's Dictionary: 19 Words on Race, Gender, and Diversity." 19, November, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/words-on-race-gender-and-diversity-you-should-know-2020-7>