



Thinking through Racisms and Antiracisms in Schools

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Thinking Differently about Racisms

How can you tell if something is racist and what can you do about it? The following will help you to answer these questions and to find places to start in challenging racisms.

Racisms affect people differently and shape the way we see them. For some people, racism appears to be a rare, if lamentable, exception to a world of polite interactions.

These people can see racism as caused by morally defective or badly educated or prejudiced individuals. Yet, for millions of Canadians, racism is an everyday reality, either always at play or at any given moment at threat of coming into play. This means that some people can be completely unaware of racism even as people around them are leading lives of quiet or not so quiet desperation. While no one is just a victim of racism (people are always more than victims), all people targeted by racism face diminished life chances.

A better way of thinking about racisms recognizes that they are systematic exclusions and not just the isolated acts of badly-intentioned people. Prejudices don't just fall from the

sky; they are enacted towards members of specific excluded groups. People make racist exclusions and benefit from them.

Excluding someone always includes someone else. We inherit past exclusions and see them as normal when we belong to the group that benefits. For example, today in Canada many First Nations people live on reserves. Yet, the system of reserves (0.2% of the Canadian land mass) is the result of colonization, the process that allows the rest of us to occupy what were once the lands of First Nations and of other Indigenous peoples. Governments forced First Nations people onto reserves, excluding them from the rest of the territory. Whether we know it or not, everyday millions of us benefit from this system, while Indigenous people daily live its consequences. Understanding racisms as exclusions helps us to recognize and address the effects of the racism, rather than the intentions of the racists

Antiracism begins with the resistance of the excluded.

Antiracism education brings the experiences of those who are excluded into wider knowledge so that we can recognize them as human beings radically like ourselves despite their differences.



Understanding Racisms as Exclusions

Idea #1: Racisms exist in the plural

Racisms are Exclusions

- There are different racisms, each with their own histories and affects.
- Racisms are dynamic and change

Implications in Schools

- Anti-Black racism is not the same as anti-Indigenous racism.
- Islamophobia is not the same as anti-Semitism.
- People can be racist in one way and antiracist in another.
- Identifying one racism, does not identify them all.

Idea #2: All Racisms Meet 3 Conditions

Condition 1: Racisms involve racialization

Racisms are Exclusions

- Categories such as “Black,” “white,” “Indian,” “Muslim” are social inventions.
- One characteristic (real or imagined) of a group defines all its members.
- Racializations are always either/or, always inescapable.

Implications in Schools

- Children often first encounter racialized difference in school.
- Cultural practices, language, religion, national origin, skin colour can all be racialized, i.e., talked about as if they are absolute differences.
- Children often tell their peers what racialized groups their peers belong to.
- Racism makes “race” important.

Condition 2: Racisms organize racializations into exclusions

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Condition 3: Racisms are racialized exclusions that involve negative consequences for the racialized and excluded.

Racisms are Exclusions

- People experience racism differently.
- Those privileged by racisms often do not see or hear how racisms affect the excluded. To be excluded is not to have what you say taken seriously.
- To be a racism, a racialized exclusion must negatively affect the excluded.

Implications in Schools

- One racialized group may be excluded in different ways.
- Children may not see school as for them. Racist name calling if not handled correctly leads to disengagement, which leads to discipline problems, which leads to being pushed out of school.
- Schools can be divided into different spaces for different racialized groups and teachers may not be aware of it.

Idea #4: Each condition for racism points to a potential antiracism

Condition 1: Disrupt racializing speech and actions

Racisms are Exclusions

- People live across and between racializing categories.
- Racializing categories are specific to time and place.
- Racist categories are learned and hence can be unlearned.

Implications in Schools

- Ask questions: Do they all have that characteristic? The Ones you know? How do you know this?
- Beware of hidden racializations: “Canadians” vs. “immigrants.”
- Avoid signifying difference as absolute: “Do all Snaidanacs hate hockey?”
- Avoid reproducing racist categories: Talk about “people racialized as Snaidanacs,” rather the just Snaidanacs.



Idea #4: Each condition for racism points to a potential antiracism

Condition 2: Organize deracialized inclusions.

Racisms are Exclusions

- If exclusions are made by people, they can be unmade.
- This can be done in small ways, e.g., in your personal interactions, and in bigger ways, e.g., in organizing politically against exclusion.
- Ending exclusion is the heart of antiracism.

Implications in Schools

- Check out what is happening with racialized and excluded students. Ask their friends. Ask their siblings. Talk to them.
- Create projects that bring people together across difference.

If you are a teacher:

- Check out whether you evaluate students differently depending on how you see them.
- Make your classroom a place that welcomes everyone.
- Teach your students to create inclusions.

Condition 3: Racisms are racialized exclusions that involve negative consequences for the racialized and excluded..

Racisms are Exclusions

- Seek out the knowledge and understandings of those who are racialized and excluded.
- Bring this into active engagement.
- Work to mitigate negative consequences

Implications in Schools

- Support those who experience exclusion.
- Follow up afterwards.

If you are a teacher:

- Listen actively and apply all your adult knowledge and understanding.
- Investigate whether you are dealing with the tip of an iceberg.
- Over time, build a repertoire for inclusive curriculum.

IS THIS RACIST?

“John is the Snaidanac in the corner.”

1. “Snaidanac” is a racialization (the opposite of “Canadian”). Out of the myriad things that John could be, it picks out one thing and makes it stand for John.
2. Does it organize exclusion?
3. Is the corner the only place that “Snaidanacs” are allowed to be?
4. If John is the only person in the corner, why is his Snaidanacness being signified?
5. Does John not consider himself to be Snaidanac in which case am I excluding his meanings and imposing my own meanings?
6. What are the consequences of my racializing and excluding statement?
7. To understand the effects of this exclusion, you need to ask John.

Since we see people in racialized ways, to pretend that you don't see that John is a Snaidanac can also be racist. For teachers, whether you racialize your students or not, you need to check out how the way they are racialized affects them. Don't assume this. Investigate it.



Examples of Responding to Racisms in Schools

A. “Why don’t you Kcunacs go back to where you came from?”

- Racist name-calling is violence and the first thing to do with violence is to stop it.
- The second thing to do is to lend comfort and support to the victim on an ongoing basis (mitigate consequences).
- Only try to figure out what is happening with the aggressor later.

N.B., within racialized groups people may call each other racist names. This is not racist because it lacks negative consequences, but public use of these names allows other people to use them too.

B. “Those damn Snaidanacs are always blocking the hallways!”

- Are spaces in your school racially segregated?
- Does the policing of segregated spaces focus on excluded group? Aren’t the other spaces equally segregated?
- Talk to the students to find out why it is that they don’t feel welcomed in the other spaces of the school (create deracialized inclusions).

C. “This stuff is not for me!”

1. In Ontario, official curriculum and the school curriculum in use often focuses on people of European origins.
2. Indigenous people, African Canadians, Asian Canadians, Moslems and other racialized and excluded students may not see themselves in lessons or teaching materials.
3. If you are a teacher: Build an inclusive classroom curriculum that represents everyone in your class, your school and more broadly in Canada (bring in excluded narratives).

Resources

Websites

- [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](http://nctr.ca/about.php)
<http://nctr.ca/about.php>.
- [Where are the children?](http://wherearethechildren.ca/en/)
<http://wherearethechildren.ca/en/>.
- American Anthropological Association, [Race: Are we so different?](http://www.understandingrace.org/) Project
<http://www.understandingrace.org/>.
- [Safe at School](https://www.safeatschool.ca/resources/resources-on-equity-and-inclusion/racism/tool-kits-and-activities)
<https://www.safeatschool.ca/resources/resources-on-equity-and-inclusion/racism/tool-kits-and-activities>.

Publications

- York Region District School Board. [Ensuring Student Success: Antiracism Indicators for An Antiracist School](#).
- Mica Pollock (ed.) [Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real About Race in School](#) (New York: The New Press, 2006)
- Stanley, T. J. (2014). [Antiracism without guarantees: A framework for rethinking racism in schools](#). *Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices*, 8,1, 4-19
- Stanley, T. J. (2009). The banality of colonialism: Encountering artifacts of genocide and white supremacy in Vancouver today. In S. Steinberg (Ed.), *Diversity and multiculturalism: A reader* (pp. 143-59). New York: Peter Lang.
- Stanley, T. (1999). [A letter to my children: Historical memory and the silences of childhood](#). In J. Robertson (ed.), *Teaching for a Tolerant World, Grades K-6: Essays and resources* (pp. 34-44). Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English.

Mobilize support: School-wide problems need school-wide solutions.

1. This takes time. You can’t do it all at one.
2. Learn as you go along.
3. Share inclusive ideas with colleagues.
4. Do this in a matter of fact way. Do not single out your racialized students.

