



Color in the Elementary School Classroom: Educating Children About Race

The COVID-19 pandemic was a major shock to our modern world, reframing the way societies operate worldwide. Another major event that recently shook our world was the impact of George Floyd's death. On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black American, was arrested by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota, for allegedly attempting to purchase cigarettes at a convenience store with a counterfeit \$20 bill. Due to illegal forceful actions by a White police officer, with the assistance of three supporting officers, what might have been a routine lawful arrest turned into a fatal tragedy, resulting in George Floyd losing his life. This incident, which was publicly witnessed and filmed by an eyewitness, was quickly shared with the public via social media and instantly became one of the world's most-viewed videos of its time. This video depicting the horrific murder of George Floyd while in the custody of White police officers sparked an unprecedented mobilization of global protests against racial discrimination. Easy global access to mainstream and social media allowed a large portion of the world, which included

children, to witness George Floyd's death.

Children are not blind to or immune from the impact of major social events that take place within our world community. The graphic images of George Floyd's death sparked a universal conversation on racism, a discussion that made its way into many public and private schools, creating a pivotal enlightenment platform for children to better comprehend issues relating to race and racism. But do Seventh-day Adventist educators have a responsibility for addressing race-related social topics within the classroom, which include issues such as people of color¹ in the United States having significantly higher rates and likelihood of the following:

1. Being targeted by police;
2. Higher COVID-19 death rates and higher rates of disease and death from multiple health-related causes²;
3. Living in communities with unregulated toxic waste (environmental justice);
4. Significantly higher denial rates for mortgages (economic injustice).³

If the answer is yes, then how should these racial inequities be discussed within our schools?

Racial Challenges

Race, ethnicity, and culture are topics that are often intertwined; *ethnicity* and *culture* are tied to a person's environment (e.g., nationality, religion, traditions), while *race* refers to the social definition of human beings based on physical characteristics such as skin color.⁴ Prejudice against others based on race, ethnicity, tribal identity, religion, and many other factors occurs in all parts of the world. From the remnants of apartheid in South Africa to ethnic tensions in Europe, hostilities between the Han and Uyghurs in China, the Arabs and the Kurds in Iraq, or the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, to name a few, racial and ethnic challenges persist, and children are watching and affected.

To obtain a glimpse into the current thoughts and feelings of Adventist elementary educators on the topic of race in Adventist elementary schools, qualitative interviews were conducted using the convenience sampling method to interview a small group of selected K-5 Adventist educators from Canada and the United States (see "Notes and References" for further description of the sample group).⁵ Although this is a

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limited North American perspective when compared to the global Adventist Church, it does provide some insight into children's feelings on race within the church's school system and their views concerning current racial challenges that Adventist teachers in North America and other locations may experience within the classroom. The following are some examples that were shared.

One kindergarten teacher said that no human living today knows exactly what Jesus looked like, yet the picture commonly perpetuated depicts Jesus as pale-skinned with long hair.⁶ This teacher intentionally placed different racial depictions of Jesus in her classroom at the beginning of each school year. One day, while sharing a story about Jesus during storytelling time, the teacher pointed to a picture in which Jesus was depicted with brown skin. A student remarked, "That's not Jesus; Jesus's face is not brown!"

Another teacher shared an interesting observation that came from a 7-year-old dark-skinned Black student in her class at a predominantly White Adventist school. During art class, students were asked to draw a picture of themselves using the colored pencils and crayons provided for them. This student used a pencil crayon called "Flesh Tone," a pale-rose-colored crayon designed to resemble the Caucasian White flesh tone color. When the teacher asked him why he chose this color, he innocently stated that the pencil crayon said, "Flesh Tone."

Another example of challenges Adventist elementary school teachers are facing, which is supported by scholarly research, is the limited racial and social learning opportunities afforded children, especially young children who have spent very little time in school because of the pandemic. COVID-19 has negatively affected the social development of children due to the social policies governing countries around the globe, which required maintaining physical and social distancing, which prevented natural social interaction that would usually occur among people.⁷ Children born shortly before and during this

period of global uncertainty have had fewer opportunities to socialize with people from different racial groups due to their limited contact with people outside of their direct families (e.g., at parks, grocery stores, and in the general community). As a result, for some children entering school—many of whom were quarantined at home and restricted from socializing with others, there has been an increase in separation anxiety and fear now at being exposed to racial characteristics of people that they may not have

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previously encountered face to face.⁸

These are just three examples of race-related issues faced by elementary teachers in Adventist schools and the need for teachers to help their students learn how to appropriately understand race and/or systemic racial biases that exist within society.

Still not sure if Adventist educators have a responsibility for addressing race-related social issues within the elementary classroom? The next section of the article provides additional insights concerning why the interviewed participants believe that race education is the responsibility of classroom teachers.⁹

The Media

One senior Seventh-day Adventist elementary educator participant expressed the strong belief that negative racial stereotyping can occur within some of our Adventist schools. This educator contends that "even before entering our [Seventh-day Adventist] schools, some of our children may already have a pre-conceived, negative picture of other racial groups due to the heavy influence of mainstream and social media, which may support their implicit or explicit bias."¹⁰ Research reveals the prevalence of systemic racial bias and stereotyping by the media (e.g., people of color being less likely to be portrayed in positive roles such as elected officials, doctors, lawyers, etc.) and more likely to be portrayed in negative roles (e.g., being criminally active, violent, and dangerous) when compared to their Caucasian counterparts, which creates a societal racial hierarchy.¹¹

Limited Opportunities for Racial Interaction

An Adventist elementary school administrator who was interviewed noted that the racial makeup within his Adventist school system has dramatically changed over the past 10 to 15 years. When asked what he felt was at the heart of this change, he stated that, "most SDA [Seventh-day Adventist, hereafter Adventist] parents in this region would not discuss this publicly, however, many [Adventist] parents from the majority racial group do not want their children interacting with children from minority racial groups." When asked why he felt this way, he stated, ". . . because of their own fears often created by limited interaction with other racial groups, and the negative projection of these groups by the media, which can create fear and apprehension of certain racial groups. Unfortunately, some parents believe that certain racial groups will negatively influence their children attending our [Adventist] schools and move them to schools they deem more appropriate for their children. As a result, many of our schools become

racial silos, thwarting the natural opportunity for our [Adventist] children to interact and learn from other racial and ethnic groups. These silos decrease student opportunities to develop lifelong [Adventist] multi-racial friendships that could make great strides towards anti-racism, equity, inclusion, and diversity, positively influencing the future direction of our schools and church.”

Uncertainty of Responsibility for Educating Children on Race

Another theme cited by educators was uncertainty regarding who is responsible for discussing this content with children. This uncertainty may create a void in structuring a cohesive learning experience within our school system. One teacher noted that some teachers simply do not want to offend anyone by discussing this topic or feel unprepared to engage in anti-racist education activities with children.

Teachers should not feel reluctant to address the topic of race, as the elementary classroom is the forum through which important societal values are shared and discussed, impacting the affective domain of children, where these values are internalized.¹²

The Development of Racial Awareness Among Children

Research suggests that children are aware of racial differences as early as infancy¹³ and that children as young as 2 years old use racial categories to reason about individual behaviors.¹⁴ Further, children 3 to 5 years old not only categorize people by race but also:

1. Develop racial biases;
2. Use racial categories to identify themselves and others to include or exclude children from activities;
3. Negotiate power in their own social/play networks based on race.¹⁵

These studies reveal that children enter school with preconceived ideas and their own random interpretations about race. Ideally, the classroom should be the place to reinforce positive racial awareness concepts that children have learned at home. Educators’ reluctance to talk to children about race/racial identity/

racism or being “colorblind” will leave a void in their inquisitive minds about a subject matter of which they are likely *well aware*.¹⁶ Christian educators, then, must be prepared to help children learn to interact positively with one another as they learn about people’s differences and similarities.

Elementary Education and Race Education Responsibility

We are living in a time of tremendous social upheaval, a time when racial justice awareness has become a glaring global issue. This is an opportunity for elementary educators in Adventist schools to acknowledge this challenge and accept the responsibility of enlightening their students about the beauty of racial diversity. God created the diversity of human color, and the children in our classes will all, at some point, interact with people from different racial backgrounds. Are we neglecting an integral part of the purpose of each child’s educational experience if we choose to ignore this instructive responsibility? Each child brings his or her own unique racial, ethnic, and cultural story to the classroom, which, when shared, can enhance students’ appreciation of the richness of human racial

diversity and prepare them to engage in the world as unbiased, independent thinkers. After all, how can children obey the commandment “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:14, NIV)¹⁷ if they do not understand and appreciate neighbors who may look and speak differently?

Over the past 70 years, global migration has significantly increased the racial and ethnic diversity within elementary classrooms, especially in North America and Europe.¹⁸ It is our responsibility as teachers to be prepared to welcome and accommodate new racial groups of students who enter our classrooms.

Children who experience racism within our schools and churches or in society are affected by its detrimental long-term effects on their health and well-being.¹⁹ Thus, it is important for Adventist educators to make space within their curriculum to integrate anti-racist principles that will enable *all* children to feel valued, accepted, and connected to teachers and classmates within the classroom environment.

How to Address the Topic of Race in the Classroom Setting

One scholar noted that some teachers’ reluctance to include issues



relating to race within the general classroom learning experience do not stem from their aversion to this content, but rather that they have simply not been trained in how to effectively impart this knowledge. As a result, they remain quiet on this issue, which allows racism to perpetuate.²⁰

How can Christian educators at the elementary level bridge the gap of unfamiliarity and discomfort concerning the topic of race? What are some tools that Christian educators can use to discuss race and anti-racism with younger children? The following discourse represents avenues that educators can infuse in their own professional growth to effectively structure the classroom environment to impactfully include the topic of race.

1. Accepting One's Own Discomfort

As Christian educators, one of the things we naturally want to do in a classroom setting is to avoid discomfort, distress, or issues that may make us feel uncomfortable—in other words, “play it safe.” However, we must get comfortable with being uncomfortable about addressing this topic in the classroom. Many societies avoid discussions about racial issues because they make people feel uneasy; however, having difficult conversations and moving through the discomfort is the only way to achieve meaningful change. Engagement in this topic will provide students with early foundational principles and tools to navigate their own beliefs and prepare them to respond appropriately when they are faced with these topics in the future.

Children identify with their race as part of their identity, just as they would their gender, ethnicity, or religious affiliation. The classroom space should be a safe place to communicate with children about such topics. It is important that our students see our genuine thoughts and emotions about racial issues within the classroom environment. Only then can they feel authentic in the experience with their teachers and school staff.

Moving Beyond Multiculturalism

Some K-8 teachers may feel that

incorporating multiculturalism (educational equity through the recognition and celebration of all ethnic and cultural groups) into the classroom is the best way to address race. However, the idea of viewing all students solely through a multiculturalism lens does not adequately address racial power hierarchy, and colorism/shadeism (prejudice based upon an individual's skin tone, usually with lighter tones being viewed as preferred within racial groups) diff-

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ferences because multiculturalism does not address the racial bias, disparity, multiracial identities, and the overall impact of racism that children need to know when learning about race.²¹

2. Recognize That God Created a World Full of Differences

As we reflect on the biological world that God created, one thing is quite clear: God must value differences. Our Creator made differences within the same species of plants and animals throughout the natural world.

Most teachers are quite comfortable discussing diversity in plants and animals but may feel reluctant to talk about racial diversity in the classroom or society. Children may already be experiencing the results of this reluctance by independently having to cope with the challenges of implicit and explicit racial bias within our schools (e.g., bullying) that may negatively affect their health and well-being.²²

There are two challenges that we would like to highlight for Adventist educators in addressing race in the classroom. The first is *ensuring racial equity within our classrooms*, which means recognizing that some groups may enter our classrooms with deficits based on family socio-economic disparities.²³ Thus, equity for teachers means being able to teach children based on their specific needs and requirements. Second is *actually discussing the topic in a manner that brings about greater understanding and appreciation*. In essence, ensuring that parents and community members understand that these discussions are designed to help children build a positive relationship with their Creator, who values diversity, rather than to push a political agenda. This fits well with Ellen White's statement that “True teachers are not satisfied with second-rate work. They are not satisfied with directing their students to a standard lower than it is possible for them to reach. They cannot be content with imparting only technical knowledge. . . . It is their ambition to inspire students with principles that will make them a positive force for the stability and uplifting of society.”²⁴

3. Partner With Parents

Fathers and mothers play a dual role as parents and educators; they are the first role models and socializing agents, from whom children learn foundational values as well as cultural and societal norms. It is imperative that parents self-assess their own thoughts and beliefs and identify and correct any racially biased perspectives that could consciously or unconsciously influence their child's perspective on race. Avoiding racial stereo-

typing early in a child's development can help prevent prejudicial behaviors once children enter school.²⁵

Teachers and educational administrators may need to engage in difficult conversations with parents regarding a racial incident that occurred with a student or a negative racial perspective that parents or other family members have instilled within a child. Do not shy away from the topic. Prayerfully seek God's wisdom on how to tactfully discuss the matter with parents before you begin the conversation. Suggestions to address these difficult conversations include the following:

A. Envision the Final Outcome

Know the outcome you want to achieve. Are you seeking action on a matter, support, or trying to help them understand a new perspective?

B. Start Your Journey

Help them understand why you view racial equity, acceptance, and inclusion as important.

C. Use Their Child's Perspective

Discuss how they would like their child to navigate the issue of race as a citizen of this world and the world to come.

D. Avoid Confrontation

People do not want to be told what to do, especially in regard to such a sensitive topic. Avoid language such as, "This is wrong"; rather, use language that will help parents see a new perspective. For example, "Have you ever considered how your child would feel if she were in this situation?"

E. Create and Share School Policies

Schools must have policies in place to help educators address these topics. Ways of crafting effective policies will be discussed in an upcoming article (see School Policy Resources). If, however, policies are already in place, share them with the parents along with standards and guidelines that the school expects students and families to follow. For example, creating a sense of belonging, well-being, and respect for equity, diversity, and

inclusion to which all constituents of the school community must adhere.

F. Summarize the Experience

Conclude by asking the parent(s) to summarize what they have learned from the discussion, and if there are things that they could do differently.

G. Offer Resources

Be prepared to provide helpful resources (i.e., video clips, articles, books) to assist them.

A recent scholarly study suggested that when young people engage in productive conversations about race at home and within the school setting, their own self-awareness becomes enhanced, and they are more open to embracing their own racial identities as well as those of others.²⁶ These venues provide the platform for children to analyze the impact of racial equity in their own communities, creating opportunities to increase

their level of compassion, empathy, and confidence in having meaningful discussions about race.²⁷

4. Help Children Understand Racial Bias and How to Appropriately Address It

Together, parents and teachers can help children frame how to appropriately address racial bias, so they will know how to negotiate this topic should it occur in their daily lives. This can consist of activities such as discussions, role plays, and video clips exposing them to various case scenarios that expand their understanding of racial bias. Teachers can also use real situations that occur within society to help students frame and understand how to respond to racism. (See Resources for Teachers on page 17 for an assortment of resources and activities that teachers can use within the classroom.)

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School Policy Resources

Schools must have policies in place to help educators as they work with students and their families on these topics. Implementation of effective policies can help create a sense of belonging, well-being, and respect for equity, diversity, and inclusion to which all constituents of the school community must adhere. Here are a few helpful resources:

Competent Crisis Response

This resource offers suggestions from The National Association of School Psychologists about what should be included in culturally competent crisis plans and preparations <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/diversity-and-social-justice/cultural-competence/culturally-competent-crisis-response>.

PACER, "Working With Culturally Diverse Families" (2023)

This website provides lists, guides, and tools for interacting and cultivating family engagement within multicultural families, immigrants, and families from specific regions of the world. <https://www.pacer.org/cultural-diversity/national-practice-guides.asp>.

The following resources provide checklists and a model of what should be included in school policies.

National Education Association, "School District Policies Against Discrimination Based on Race, Religion, and National Origin" (2018): 16-21: <https://neadjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/NEA-Legal-Guidance-on-Students-Rights-2018.03.13.pdf>.

Maureen B. Costello et al., "A Guide for Administrators, Counselors and Teachers: Responding to Hate and Bias at School" *Teaching Tolerance* (2017): <https://teaching.pitt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/DIFD-2019-Responding-to-Hate-at-School.pdf>.

General Children's Books That Include Characters of Different Racial Backgrounds (Available for purchase online)

Karen Auto, *I Can, Too!* (Toronto, Ont.: Scholastic Canada Ltd., 2022).

Keisha Cuffie, *D Is for Dazzling* (Halton, Ontario, Canada: Keisha Cuffie, 2022). ISBN 13: 9781778048906..

Diversity Books and Reading Materials <https://diversebooks.org/>

Melissa Ewers, *Belonging Is . . .* (Atlanta, Ga.: IG Design Group Americas, Inc., 2021).

Jerome Gay, Jr., *Talking to Your Children About Race: A Biblical Framework for Honest Conversations* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2022).

Joanna Ho, *Eyes That Kiss in the Corners* (New York: Harper Collins Books, 2022).

Colin Kaepernick, *I Color Myself Different* (New York: Kaepernick Publishing, 2022).

Monique G. Smith, *My Heart Fills With Happiness* (Victoria, B.C.: Orca Book Publishers, 2018).

Bellen Woodard, *More Than Peach* (New York: Scholastic Inc., 2022).

Online Reading Resources for K-5 Teachers (for purchase or free)

Seventh-day Adventist Official Position on Racism
<https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/racism/>

10 Principles for Talking About Race in Schools
<https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engage-ment/tools-tips/10-principles-talking-about-race-school>

10 Tips on Talking to Kids About Race and Racism
<https://www.pbs.org/education/blog/10-tips-on-talking-to-kids-about-race-and-racism>

Joe R. Feagin and Debra Van Ausdale, *The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

Terry Husbands, *But I Don't See Color: The Perils, Practices, and Possibilities of Anti-racist Education* (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2016).

Ihoema U. Iruka et al., *Don't Look Away—Embracing Anti-Bias Classrooms* (Lewisville, N.C.: Gryphon House, Inc., 2020).

Kids' Health
<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/talk-about-race.html>

L. Derman-Sparks, J. O. Edwards, and C. M. Goins, *Anti-bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* (Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2010).

Talking to Kids About Race: Tips for Teachers and Other Educators

<https://www.chop.edu/health-resources/talking-kids-about-race-tips-teachers-and-other-educators>

The authors do not endorse any specific resource; this information is provided for general information. Readers should use their discretion to review and select resources that will be appropriate for their classroom.

Teaching Activities That Can Be Used to Help Discuss Race With Children

"All About Me"
<https://kidsactivitiesblog.com/192247/all-about-me-worksheet-ideas/>

Activities to Help Discuss Race With Children
<https://www.chicagoparent.com/education/at-home-learning/activities-to-discuss-race-with-kids/>

Activities That Promote Racial and Cultural Awareness
https://www.pbs.org/kcts/preciouschildren/diversity/read_activities.html

How to Talk to Children About Race
<https://www.pbs.org/parents/talking-about-racism>

Learning Activities to Help Discuss Race With Children
<https://www.chicagoparent.com/education/at-home-learning/activities-to-discuss-race-with-kids/>

Safe@School
<https://www.safeatschool.ca/resources/resources-on-equity-and-inclusion/racism/tool-kits-and-activities>

Talking to Children About Race
<https://www.pbs.org/parents/talking-about-racism>

Teaching Young Children About Race
<https://www.teachingforchange.org/teaching-about-race>

Resources With Biblical Principles on the Topic of Race for Children

Xochitl Dixon, *Different Like Me* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Our Daily Bread Publishing, 2020).

Pamela Kennedy, *All the Colours That I See* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Kids, 2018).

Shai Linne, *God Made Me and You* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2018).

Trillia Newbell, *God's Very Good Idea* (Epsom, U.K.: The Good Book Company, 2017).

Matthew Turner, *When God Made You* (New York: Penguin Convergent Books, 2017).

Dorena Williamson, *Colorfull: Celebrating the Colors God Gave Us* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Publishing Group, 2018).

_____, *Crowned With Glory* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Publishing Group, 2018).

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General Educator Resource Kits About Race

Anti-Racism Resource Kit Committee on Race Relations and Cross-cultural Understanding – 2007

The purpose of this resource kit is to encourage educators to provide opportunities for their students to enhance their self-awareness, knowledge, and strategies that are needed to discuss, understand, and address issues of racism that may be found in their classrooms and communities. Information is sourced from the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre in Calgary. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/511bd4e0e4b0cecdc77b114b/t/55a95b28e4b05f2993aa5882/1437162280833/Anti_Racism_Resource_Kit.pdf.

Children’s Anti-Racism Activity Toolkit: Inclusive Games and Art Activity (for children ages 6-12)

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide children with the opportunity to be creative and share their knowledge and feelings on important topics, such as racism, discrimination, equality, and reconciliation through play and discussion. https://legacy.winnipeg.ca/cms/recreation/pdfs/antiracism_toolkit.pdf.

Educator Tools for Teaching About Race (K-12)

This site provides educators with creative resources that can be used to bolster the development of positive identity for children.

<https://oursharedfuture.si.edu/resources/k-12-educational-resources>.

Racism and the Box: Lesson Plan Rachael Sanowski – 2000

Educators can invite students to reflect on the role racism plays in self-betrayal and self-deception. The lesson plan contains historic racist actions in society. <http://learningtogive.org>.

Teaching Tolerance: Lesson Plans on Race and Ethnicity

This website provides free educational materials on various social justice topics for educators. The *Lesson Plans on Race and Ethnicity* contains classroom activities that are available to a broad age range and varied grade levels. <http://tolerance.org>.

United Nations: International Decade for People of African Descent – 2015-2024

Provides historical information and program of activities from U.N. documents about people of African descent. <https://www.un.org/en/observances/decade-people-african-descent>.

* The authors do not endorse any specific resource listed here; this information is provided for general information. Readers should use their discretion to review and select resources that will be appropriate for their classroom.

5. Utilize Special Events to Bring Racial Awareness to Life in the Classroom

In February 1926, Carter Woodson organized the first Black History Month in the United States, designed to recognize the diverse contributions and achievements of Black people to current and past civilizations.²⁸ Since then, other groups have created their own recognition months for public awareness and learning, such as Hispanic Heritage Month in October. While these official events are important and can broaden our understanding of the contributions of different racial and ethnic groups, unfortunately, some schools use these occasions as singular efforts for the inclusion of other racial groups. Rather, the goal must be to make racial inclusion, equity, and diversity a natural component of our curriculum throughout the year. The implicit and explicit curriculum should highlight the accomplishments and contributions of diverse individuals in multiple content areas

(e.g., academics, customs, history, science, languages, food, holidays, etc.). Avoid using celebration of cultural events as the school’s major approach to promoting racial awareness. Remember, the primary issue of race is identity; it is not simply about cultural events or customs.

Although Adventist teachers are part of a global Seventh-day Adventist teaching community, teachers in different geographic locations will not have direct access to the same events, historical places, people, or general resources; however, teachers can draw on their own unique local resources to promote racial awareness within the classroom (e.g., museums, historical community markers). For example, one school invited a centennial member of the church into the class to help children learn about his life growing up during the U.S. civil-rights era.

6. Use Biblical Principles to Stimulate Healthy Long-term Perspectives on Race

Insightful devotional topics are an excellent method that teachers can use to help children accept, appreciate, and empathize with the plight of other racial groups and understand why people think the way they do. The Bible is ripe with illustrations that educate children about how God views race. An excellent example is the parable of the Good Samaritan. Teachers can modernize the story to include race, helping children to see that their neighbors are people from all racial groups.

Another great biblical example is how Paul addressed the discriminatory, racist attitudes of Jews against the Gentiles. Instead of ignoring the problem, Paul confronted the practice directly, stating that “There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him” (Romans 12:2).

Phillip’s ministry to the Ethiopian

(a person of color), resulting in the man's baptism, is another example that illustrates God's love and care for people from all races.

7. Incorporate the Principles of "The Fruits of the Spirit"

Incorporating the easy-to-understand, biblical principles embedded in "the fruits of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22, 23) into the curriculum to engender non-biased perspectives on race is another helpful tool. When developing lesson plans, teachers can make a conscious effort to include the fruit of "love," helping students to see how God's love is actualized when they view and treat people from different racial groups with godly love.

The fruit of "self-control" is another

fitting example that can be used. Teachers can make this principle practical for children by helping them to see how to practice self-control in their behavior toward people who look different from them—by refraining from impulsive negative verbal comments about the color of their skin, hair, or appearance, and helping them practice this within the classroom setting. Children need to know that it is OK to recognize the differences in human beings; however, we should not regard such differences as indicating that the person is inferior, unappreciated, or evil, or that the individual is superior or considered of greater value simply because of his or her racial background. Rather, help students look for positive characteris-

tics that demonstrate the fruits of "love" and "kindness." We want them to understand and value differences they see in one another. Putting the principles of the fruits of the Spirit into practical, demonstrable actions that children can use will help solidify in their minds that all people, regardless of race, color, ethnicity, or other physical differences, are part of God's family.

Finally, when major racial incidents such as George Floyd's death take place, help children make sense of what occurred by inviting them to lean on the power of prayer, where children and adults can pray together for comfort and healing for the individuals affected by these unfortunate incidents.



8. The Classroom as a Model Experience for Learning About Race

Teachers should take an introspective look at the visual materials that decorate their classrooms as well as the video, audio, and textbook materials they use. Do they reflect people of different racial groups? What perspective of race will children absorb based on the materials posted on the bulletin boards, stories shared in books, videos, and other learning materials within your classroom? Are the materials in the environment inclusive of different races? It is important to intentionally reflect diversity in the materials used in the classroom environment. Even if these resources do not include a variety of racial groups, it is still vital for teachers to intentionally include other racial groups in their presentations to help increase familiarity and create opportunities for discussion. Taking the time to equitably ensure the inclusion of subject matter from diverse racial groups will help students appreciate differences. This may take extra effort on the teacher's part, but it will go a long way in helping to solidify in the minds of children the contributions and challenges of different racial groups within modern society.

One elementary teacher at a small Adventist academy shared this example of an activity she used to implement racial awareness within her Grade 1 classroom. When discussing God's protective angels, she incorporated pictures of angels with different skin tones in a PowerPoint presentation. Children were asked to point to the picture that resembled what they thought their guardian angel looked like. All the children except for two, who identified as children of color, chose angels that resembled the Caucasian race, including four children of color. The teacher used this as a teaching moment to help children understand that the paintings of angels could portray different races and that pictures of angels with darker skin

tones are also God's angels, similar to angels with other skin tones. This teacher now intentionally looks for diverse ways to depict pictures of Jesus and Christianity within the classroom to help children see that God embraces people of all races.

A recent societal example that could be used to help direct children's attention to racial inequity is the lack of clean water in Jackson, Mississippi, U.S.A, a majority Black community that has lived with decades of deferred maintenance for its water-treatment plants, resulting in a recent water crisis when the main water-

When teachers have a non-biased perspective and a willingness to openly share their own journey toward understanding racial identity and racial inequities, this can make a huge impression on the minds of young children.

treatment facility failed. The city was left without potable water. Teachers can share a story such as this and ask students what could be done to address this problem. If students want to address this social justice issue by volunteering to raise funds to send fresh water to the residents of this city, teachers can facilitate this initiative, which will leave a lasting memory of the importance of getting involved in social issues that impact human beings.

Another example that illustrates racism in action is the recent violent backlash toward people of Asian descent living in North American and some European nations. In some

countries, China has been blamed for the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic within the country, leading to racist attacks against Asians living in these places. Teachers can help children to understand these injustices, listen to their responses and ideas on how to address them, then help create appropriate strategies to address these injustices.

While the current caste and shadeism system in India is not typically considered a racial issue,²⁹ it is just as much an important social issue as people are discriminated against based on the families of origin or the color of their skin. Teachers can educate students about this practice and help them develop strategies to deal with the issue of shadeism and caste systems.

Faculty-development meetings provide another opportunity for teachers to openly discuss and share ideas about how to infuse anti-racist content into the curriculum. Our experience has shown that some of the best teaching ideas emerge from these sessions. In addition, bringing in experts who can provide *ongoing* sensitivity training on race, ethnicity, and cultural diversity for teachers, administrators, board members, and parents will help to expedite knowledge acquisition and practice implementation for teachers more effectively than if they are left to do these things on their own.

There are a variety of free online resources that can assist Adventist teachers in addressing racial bias within the classroom, such as YouTube video clips and general online learning activities. Examples of these resources are enclosed in this article (see *Resources for Teachers* page 17). However, the most significant resource for students is the attitude, behavior, and openness of their teachers.³⁰ Adventist educators at all levels serve as role models and play a powerful role in the lives of children. When teachers have a non-biased perspective and a willingness to openly share their own journey toward

understanding racial identity and racial inequities, this can make a huge impression on the minds of young children. Children will notice teachers' attitudes and behavior regarding racial diversity. Even if adults are not conscious that they are role modeling racial attitudes, children are always watching.

Conclusion

Next to parents, teachers have the most influence on a child's perspective of the world, making it a "moral and ethical" responsibility to ensure that children have a proper understanding of our world, which includes racial issues. When teachers talk to children at an early age about race, this helps them to understand, respect, and appreciate their own racial background and to understand that all races are equally valuable.³¹

Human beings created divisive-ness based on color, not God. In Genesis 1:26 God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness" (Genesis 1:26, italics supplied). The Bible is clear in declaring from the beginning that all people of all races carry the image of God. Our role as Christian educators is to foster the natural imagination and curiosity among children that will enable them to view skin color as God intended it:

- A gift that that enables us to see the broad spectrum of God's creative ability.
- An opportunity to better understand and appreciate differences.
- The conviction that even though our skin colors may differ externally, we have much more in common, physically, mentally, and spiritually because we are all made in the image of God. ✍

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The term "person of color" is used in the United States to indicate that someone is not White. This includes, for example, Blacks, Hispanics, people from the Middle East and Asian countries, and those of mixed race or Jewish heritage. See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/person%20of%20color>. However, issues of race are not only between Blacks and Whites, and it is not only an American phenomenon.
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3. Liz Mineo, "A Reading List on Issues of Race," *The Harvard Gazette* (2020): <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/06/a-reading-list-on-issues-of-race/>; The White House, "Advancing Equity and Racial Justice Through the Federal Government: Executive Order 13985": <https://www.whitehouse.gov/equity/>; U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Racism and Health" (n.d.): <https://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/racism-disparities/index.html>.
4. Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2006).
5. Participants for this informal inquiry provided a limited insight into Seventh-day Adventist elementary educators' perspectives on race. Participants were selected using the convenience sample qualitative method, a research method that provides researchers with easier access to participants due to geographic/regional proximity, researcher and participant time availability, and willingness to participate in research. Five Adventist educators from Canada and the United States (two males and three females, from diverse racial groups) were contacted by phone or in

person between 2022 and 2023 and interviewed using the same series of questions that related to their perspectives on race and Adventist education at the elementary level. It is important to note that this is a very small sample size. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a worldwide denomination whose members hold diverse perspectives; thus, participants used in this article provided a limited North American perspective. To protect the privacy of teacher participants, the identifying details have been changed.

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23. Equality makes sure that everyone has access to the same quality and number of resources so that desired outcomes can be reached; equity makes sure that individuals have access to the resources that they need, recognizing that some may need more assistance than others in order to achieve the same outcomes. For more see Colleen Murphy, “Equity vs. Equality: What’s the Difference?” *Health* (January 2023): <https://www.health.com/mind-body/health-diversity-inclusion/equity-vs-equality>.

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