# Race and School Culture - Session 4 Notes

* Check out the resources at the Program Hub ([link](https://prizmah.org/race-and-school-culture-home))
* Note Taking Choice Board for you to use tonight ([link](https://prizmah.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Race_School_Culture_Worksheet.pdf))

## Introduction - Debra Shaffer Seeman

* Today I learned with Mark Gerson, author of The Telling - a book about the Passover Haggadah. He noted that the moment in the Haggadah when we finally get around to actually telling the exodus story is not the exodus story we would have expected. After all, if you were telling the story about the Israelites exodus from Egypt, what text would you choose? Ummm, how about the book of Exodus? Nope, the Haggadah tells the story of the exodus using Deuteronomy 26:5. Moses imagines a person - a farmer - in the future - and describes the story of our history through the lens of this imagined future. It was Einstein who said that the most important part of reality is the imagination. And so tonight, we hope to spark your imagination as we enter the imagined future where we are able to move from slavery to freedom together.
* The arc of the 5 sessions
* The role of today’s session in the arc
* What you may not notice from first glance is that the folks speaking with us this evening represent elementary, middle and high schools, schools from a range of Jewish perspectives, work with students, faculty, and the broader community within which their school is situated, and work that addresses each of the 5Ps that Nishant Mehta explained to us. So let’s start by reminding ourselves of that framework (reshared Nishant’s slide referencing the 5 P’s of DEI work in school culture change: philosophy, people, programs, policies, and practices.

## School Presenters ([bios link](https://prizmah.org/race-and-school-culture-presenters))

* Dr. Eytan Apter - Charles E Smith Jewish Day School (Middle School Social Studies Teacher and Israel Engagement Coordinator)
* Beryl Bresgi- Solomon Schechter Day School of Bergen County (Head Librarian and Director of Holocaust Studies)
* Dr. Rivka Press Schwartz - SAR Academy High School (Associate Principal)
* Molly Sloan - Portland Jewish Academy (Librarian)
* Tikvah Wiener - The IDEA School (Head of School)

### Tikvah Wiener - The IDEA School

* IDEA School - a new school, so don’t have to undo so much culture - but have to build it.
* Modern Orthodox PBL high school
* Equity and Equality are values that are baked into the school model
  + Part of our mission is to see the interconnectedness of all things (environment and planet) and how all human beings are connected.
  + Jewish value Tzelem Elokim - of seeing the Divine spark in all human beings
* Encouraged students to go to George Floyd protests - there was some pushback from parents, but not much.
* Educational model of PBL is to go out into the world and find problems - racism is a problem that has been incorporated into the program.
* Connection between schools in the community by engaging in a project in Teaneck, NJ. Creating two memorials in the Teaneck Green - for enslaved peoples and the holocaust.
  + Creating texts with black students in the community
  + MLK program and Black History Month programs in the IDEA School

### Molly Sloan - Portland Jewish Academy

* PJA - Librarian for 10 years and parent of 8th grader.
* JDS serving infants - 8th grade.
* Jewish engagement, kavod, respect - Think for Yourself, Work for the World (tagline)
* Middot of PJA (Core Values)
  + Kavod (respect), Akhrayut (responsibility), Zehut (Identity)
    - Values that animate the diversity work
* Diversity Statement - all are from the stamp of the first person, but none are the same
* Viewing the world through a Jewish lens
* Programs, policy and Jewish culture are all impacted by this vision.
* Anti-racism is the “air they breathe” and is becoming who they are.
* Addressing, uncovering, and learning who they are.
* (Her slides are available in the Resource Hub)

### Dr. Eytan Apter - Charles E Smith Jewish Day School

* Pluralistic pre-K - 12th grade.
* Like many schools, CES took an institutional look at who they are and what they are going to do.
* Eytan participated in Facing History and Ourselves which exposed some of the curricular changes that Eytan could make.
  + First part of his own work was about himself - what he can do as an individual in his classroom, and how he teaches history.
  + Then collaborated with other people at CESJDS.
  + How to bring it outside of the classroom and curriculum.
* School-wide discussions
  + Police shootings, protests - community conversations
    - CES - school decided that they needed to have broader change, including school-wide culture.

### Beryl Bresgi - Solomon Schechter Day School of Bergen County

* Wrote the collection development policy for the school as the school librarian. Took on a particular lens being from S. Africa.
* Shoah education - was primarily literature based.
* To create a school-wide developmentally appropriate curriculum for the Shoah led them to realize that it needed to be value based.
  + Empathy, caring and civic courage.
* Laid the groundwork for the conversations for race and school culture they are having now.
  + 3rd and 4th grade - understanding about activism and what that means.
  + IB learner profile - open-minded and reflective.
  + Set up students to think critically and rationally about equity and race that emerged from reading that was aligned to the mission and core values of the school.
  + School examined redlining and met with authors.
  + Support of the Leadership Team and the entire faculty.

### Dr. Rivka Press Schwartz - SAR High School

* SAR HS has spoken about race in History classes.
* After murder of George Floyd - stepped back to ask what is being done outside of the history classrooms.
* Were not engaging with the boro and city around them.
* Turned to think about what it would look like to create a connection between the communities.
  + The Knitting Project - Knitting the SAR community into the community within which they are situated. They considered the obvious pitfalls of other programs, and designed their own programs.
  + Came back to many of the same challenges
  + Machon Siach - Research Arm of SAR High School. What could the Knitting Project look like?
  + Creating community among teachers might be easier, less fraught - than bringing HS students together.
    - Now - just beginning this work - reached out to teachers in Catholic schools in the Bronx that they already had connection with through citizenship projects.
    - Looking toward a Knitting Project - sustained engagement between communities.
      * Focus on faculty for now, rather than students under the theory that if we build faculty relationships, that will be longer-term and shape the vision of ourselves and what is done within our schools.

## Questions and Answers

### Q: What were the foundations that were laid or that you needed to lay in order to do your work?

* **A:** Beryl - engagement of the leadership team. Once they are committed, you can do it in the classroom. Keeping the conversation going and infusing the language into the culture of the school. The Library needs to look different. It needs to expand beyond Black History Month.
* **F/U:** What is the impact of that work?
* **A:** Students are used to hearing words like bystander and upstander, windows and mirrors - it is expected by the students now. The language they are exposed to is infused very early.

### Q: What is uniquely important in framing this work within a JDS?

* **A:** Eytan - like many educators, we draw back to our own experiences. R. Abraham Joshua Heschel is the model, but we often stop short there. We approach our role not as the savior - we have not always been the models - but rather learn both the positives and the negatives. How do we enact change in our communities? We are not learning this to be the white saviors, we are not asking our schools to have a food drive, but to really look at the factors that led to the current problems - and what do we need to do to eradicate those problems? Through b’Tzelem Elokim - it is the right thing to do.
* **A:** Tikvah - This is not about one program or one text. It is a vocabulary and Torah language around this. Had a unit where students studied about Tzedek and Mishpat - the language that they have used. What are the values of the school. IDEA School - Hevruta - how do we translate that value which includes empathy and listening - and bring it into the conversation. How do we shift our thought about Torah language in this social justice way?

### Q: What are the challenges to this work?

* **A:** Eytan - We never assume that everyone is of the same opinion. Sometimes when we talk about DEI - we assume that everyone is on the same page as us. And then there is some discomfort. We believe everyone is made in the image of God? What does that mean with affirmative action? People do not want to rock the boat - so they pick things that everyone agrees with - MLK. But not, reparations or defunding the police… If you avoid the conversations as a faculty, then you can do it comfortably in your classrooms. If there is a faculty member who gets angry - then there will be students who do the same thing.
* **A:** Rivka - Over the past 4 years listening to increasing polarization in American life - and keep the disagreeing people siloed out. Modern Orthodox HS while is religiously similar is politically very different. 60/40 split community politically. We cannot go into classrooms and assume that everyone is on the same page with DEI work. Devoted an enormous amount of time as a history faculty talking about race and how they were going to teach it - and figuring out how to say things in language that students can hear. That is the role of educators.

### Q: How has Portland worked with faculty?

* **A:** Molly - the school started a conversation (PLC) among the faculty - looking at articles, current events, different aspects of education through diversity. The conversations challenge assumptions. They have defined it as a Brave Space - everyone is being asked to stretch, reveal themselves, and be vulnerable. Be honest about failings and find out what is true to themselves and how it will work for their students.
* **A:** Tikvah - In listening to everyone share - what was a moment when you stepped into a Brave Space and what tool did you use to make that conversation happen more smoothly?
* **A:** Molly - Remembering early in diversity PLC - [Danger of a Single Story Ted Talk](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story) - it was an aha moment. Realized that as a librarian, had told stories that were blond hair/blue eyed - and not Nigerian children. Talked about ways to improve practice.

### Q: Beryl - re: Portland Jewish Academy’s PLC - concern is that you collect people who are like-minded and want to learn. Does that leave out people?

* **A:** Molly - it is by choice, and self-selected. However, administrators are all part of the conversation - and they have taken conversations there and brought them to school-wide conversations.
* **A:** Eytan - there is a self-selected thing. It applies that it is humanities - but if you really want to make the change - DEI is not taught by one discipline. Need to break the barriers of departments - and convince the math teacher that race, equity and inclusion is in math as well. The number of PhD’s, the teaching of eugenics. In order to do this change properly - you need to start with everyone.
* **A:** Tikvah - MLK program, brought many sources from Jewish texts about fighting racism and treating the other with dignity.

### Q: Tikvah - We have to be careful of the age old Jewish habit of engaging in the “Oppression Olympics” - many worry that if we set aside our holocaust narrative, that something may happen. How have you engaged multiple stories in this conversation, used multiple languages?

* **A:** Rivkah - Have an elective (PPE) Philosophy, Politics, and Economics - team taught class. Three issues that can be examined from all angles. Second issue is: Reparations (first holocaust reparations and then move on to the history of racial harm). Holocaust becomes an avenue of entry for the racial harm conversation.
* **A:** Beryl - Interdisciplinary learning units - math teachers joined with history teachers in a session of understanding red-lining. Back to core values of learning all together, it gave an opportunity for the faculty.
* **A:** Tikvah - Windows and Mirrors - mirror of our story and a window into someone else’s story.

### Q: What text informs your work?

* **A:** Eytan - Beverly Daniel Tatum ([link](https://www.beverlydanieltatum.com/)) - why are all the black kids sitting in the back of the cafeteria? Brings in the history, but is not a history book.
* **A:** Molly – Fostering an anti-Racist school Culture – [Angel Tucker](https://www.kcur.org/arts-life/2015-03-27/how-johnson-county-librarians-grow-young-poets) (Kansas City Race Project). [Tanner Colby](http://tannercolby.com/) – [Some of my Best Friends are Black](http://tannercolby.com/sombfab).
* **A:** Rivka - Choice is not anti-racism books, not books about how white people think about racism. Tulsa Race Massacre - when students read about the black American experience - it is about educating them about the experience not indoctrinating.

## Questions from the Group

### Q: Tania Schweig - What are your thoughts on bringing the right-leaning parents along who start off on defense? For many schools - there is political and religious diversity - we represent a multiplicity of voices - how do we bring parents along?

* **A:** Eytan - make a distinction between justice as a concept and justice as a policy. We are not teaching a specific policy - that students have to vote a particular way. We can disagree what justice looks like, but we can agree that what is happening does not look right, and we can do better. It is difficult sometimes to allow those approaches to exist. If we disagree with the change and how we do it, it doesn’t mean that we disagree that change needs to happen.
* **A:** Siri - Thinking about how to walk that line. Part of the way they do this at Milken - it is completing the story of history. While they are teaching, they state that it is to complete the telling of history, and reflect honestly the full history of America. For the Jewish experience, both privilege and persecution can exist together.
* **A:** Scott (Mirowitz) - a resource they used is Tiffany Jewel - This Book is Anti-Racist. There is misunderstanding around the use of the language. They should understand that the way they understand racism can be different from the way they do it. They should interrogate statements and understand where they are coming from. Intersectionality is important - but have not done so much work on it yet.
* **A:** Rivka - Intersectionality - has become a triggered term in their communities. Intersectionality - Kimberley Crenshaw - originally from the law, women of color who are victims of domestic violence. (link) Teach students where that originally came from and change the conversation away from the triggering issues. The real reality of Jewish vulnerability is called into question when we are called white. For the community that I’m in - if I use certain terms, it shuts down the conversation. If I can get the idea across without stopping the conversation, then I prefer not to use certain terms, but rather to explain the meaning of the term.
* **A:** Tikvah - must be aware of the audience. The terms are loaded - and we have to lean into that space. How do we in our own space - how are moving the needle in the community with the parents - for the whole community? The community can be the place to have these conversations because we are linked by our religious similarities.
* **A:** Eytan - Anti-Semitism exists, yes. Racism exists, yes. The two are not the same. Our minority experience is not a similar problem to racism. We need to understand that. It does get lumped together - but they are very different and worthy fights.
* **A:** Beryl - as educators we should not forget the power of children educating parents. Our work is with students - and they bring that home. It is a powerful opportunity to bring the adults along.

### Q: Share with the group, any advice that you would give to someone undertaking this process. Look back at the work you have done, and the process you have gone through as an individual and as a school.

* **A:** Eytan - we want the perfect curriculum, we want to map it out - If we map the perfect curriculum, this will never get done. There is a fear that we will get it wrong - but you should trust in yourselves and begin the work. Be reflective. It will need to change every year. Don’t worry about forming the perfect committee, or the perfect book. Start with one lesson and invite a teacher in to ask, “What can I do better?”
* **A:** Rivka - Agree with Eytan about just starting. Arlo Guthrie - if the world were perfect there would be nothing for us to do. Anything your school or community does will be progress.
* **A:** Molly - Echoing Eytan and Rivka - we are moving it forward. You are not free to desist. What am I doing today to make the world better. Know your values, listen to diverse voices, and let them lead you in the work you do.
* **A:** Beryl - We are not going to finish this work - but for it to be enduring, if we ground it in our mission and our core values, it will endure in our school as something that has to be a part of the school culture.
* **A:** Tikvah - You don’t have to have a diverse staff or student body to start. Gila Sachs - there were no Jewish values in our home, there were just values. We have a responsibility to change the world - and we just have to start.
* **A:** Rivka - if we do the work, we will inevitably mess up, acknowledge, learn from it - and model our own learning and growth.

**Debra:** Own your own identity - we are all in this process together.

**Tonda Case:** There is no destination in this work. We are always in this work to