



# Digital Racial Literacies in Schools and Teaching

Workshop for BCTELA | Oct. 24, 2025



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PROJECT TEAM

# Agenda

▶ **01**

What are digital racial literacies?

▶ **02**

Key concepts: micro-cultural identities and digital intersectionality

▶ **03**

Film example: Late Bloomer

▶ **04**

Interactive mosaics - tinker and play

# The "Why"

- We're at the intersection of urgent realities in education
  - Ongoing **racial inequities**
  - The **ubiquity of digital life** in youth culture
  - The growing power of **algorithms shaping identity**
- **Digital spaces are not neutral:**
  - Our students often experience the world *through* digital platforms
  - Platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Instagram are cultural spaces that **construct, commodify, contest race**
  - Algorithms can **reproduce bias**- earning from data that reflects systemic racism
  - **Virality**- **content that is controversial, sensational, or culturally dominant** spreads faster
  - As educators, we wonder:
    - How do we **teach racial literacy** in a world where students live *digitally* as much as physically?
    - How can digital platforms and literacies to deepen and complexify our anti-racist work?

RACE

## Which skin color emoji should you use? The answer can be more complex than you think

FEBRUARY 9, 2022 · 5:00 AM ET

By Alejandra Marquez Janse, Patrick Jarenwattananon, Asma Khalid



5-Minute Listen

+ PLAYLIST



Choosing a skin tone emoji can open a complex conversation about race and identity for some.

Cate Dui/NPR

## What are digital literacy practices related to identity?

"I present as very pale, very light skinned. And if I use the white emoji, I feel like I'm betraying the part of myself that's Filipino," Racela, of Littleton, Mass., said. "But if I use a darker color emoji, which maybe more closely matches what I see when I look at my whole family, it's not what the world sees, and people tend to judge that."

<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/09/1078977416/race-chat-emoji-skin-tone-colors>

## Racial Literacy Development

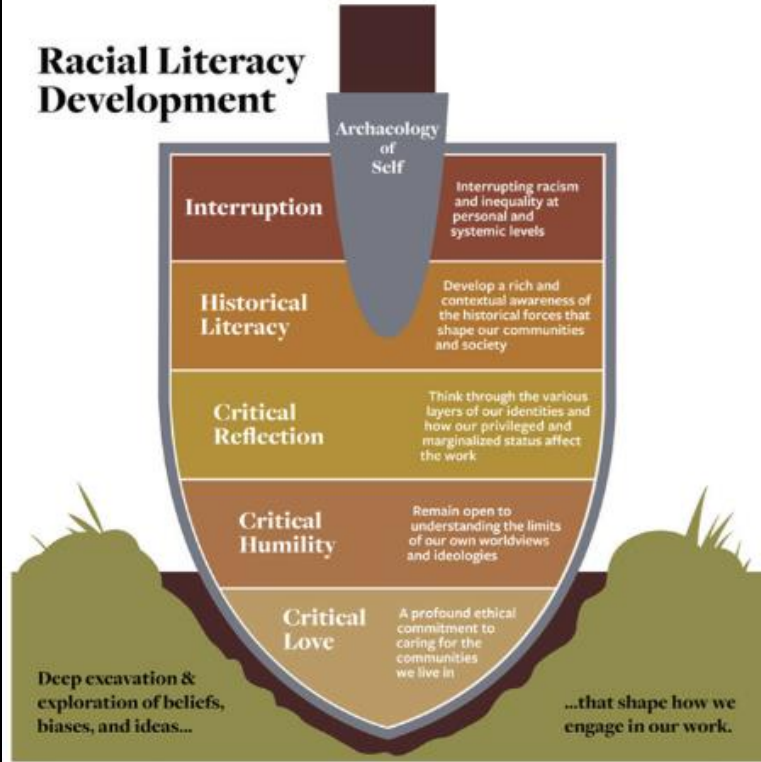


FIGURE 1

The six components of this racial literacy development model can guide language arts education. Image designed by Angel Acosta. Used with permission of Angel Acosta.

## What are racial literacies?

"Racial literacy is a skill that allows people to engage in deep conversations about race and other social constructions within which we live. It is the ability to talk productively about race and racism with the intent of moving toward the interruption and dismantling of racist and unequal practices and policies" (Price-Dennis & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021).

What does *interruption* of racism look like for you, in your context? What does interruption look like in digital spaces?

Sealey-Ruiz, Y. (2022). An archaeology of self for our times: Another talk to teachers. *English Journal*, 111.5, (21-26).  
<https://publicationsncte.org/deliver/fulltext/ej/111/5/englishjournal31819.pdf?itemId=/content/journals/10.58680/ej202231819&imeType=application/pdf>

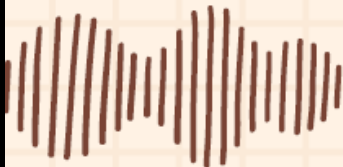
# Micro-cultural Identities

Micro-cultural identities attempt to capture "the numerous components of positioning, practices, choices, and perspectives that make up the unique identities of each individual" (Mahiri, 2017, p. 169). "The virtually limitless combinations of components reflect and define uniqueness of individuals that cannot be captured in static categories" (Mahiri, 2017, p. 169).

Micro-cultural identities draw upon the work of James Gee (2003) who writes about constructing identities in digital spaces that coalesce around shared affinities, goals, and practices (e.g. hip hop culture, digital culture, etc.)

Micro-cultural identities also encompass our "identity contingencies" (Steele, 2010), or perceptual components of our identities (skin colour, hair type, body size, etc).





# Digital Intersectionality

E.g. #BlackLivesMatter

- Social media platforms allows users to express cultural competency and understanding of social problems through a lens of race.
- In addition to their racial backgrounds, individuals bring their class, gender, sexuality, religious and other embodied identities with them to online platforms and discourse.
- Intersecting identities lead to conversations about norms and behaviours that need to be negotiated and debated, and can impact the larger movement and "propel and/or stunt the movement's ideological underpinnings" (Tynes, Schuschke & Noble, 2016, p. 36).
- "Social media therefore becomes a tool for the empowerment of individuals claiming identification with multiple social groups and allows them to positively affirm their unique positioning within society (Lindsey, 2013)." (Tynes, Schuschke & Noble, 2016, p. 337).



Tynes, B., Schuschke, J. & Noble, S. (2016) Digital intersectionality theory and the #Blacklivesmatter movement. In S. Noble & B. Tynes (Eds.) The intersectional internet. Peter Lang.

Using cultural texts to understand digital racial identity



# Some Context...

## Immigration & International Students

- Canada has one of the highest immigration rates globally (23%+ foreign-born as of 2021). International students—especially from Punjab—often transition to permanent residency through study and work.
- Punjabi is now one of Canada's most spoken non-official languages, reflecting the large migration from Punjab.

## Labour & Exploitation

- Punjabi students, due to restricted visas,, frequently work in low-wage jobs (warehouses, delivery, elder care, cleaning) despite having aspirations in other fields.

## Racism & Media Narratives

- Anti-immigrant and anti-South Asian racism has intensified post-pandemic. Students report profiling, stereotyping, and exploitation in housing, work, and postsecondary spaces. Media portrayals of youth in Brampton and Surrey fuel moral panic about "foreigners taking over"





03

Tinkering and  
Storytelling:

Interactive  
digital mosaics

## The "Why"

"Educators, teachers and researchers must challenge the typological methods used to create the false concepts of race. Just as the anti-slavery movement of the nineteenth century delegitimized and eventually banned servitude, the anti-racist movement of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are unpacking racial superiority and racism, and in their public critique raising new questions about racialization and racial identity. Today, many stand strong to their experience as being a marker of resilience, and racial identity is now understood as a marker of social relationship rather than as an unalterable individual trait (Lopez, 1994; Zuberi, 2001)" (Battiste, 2013, 136-137).



Marie Battiste is a Mi'kmaq educator, scholar and professor, University of Saskatchewan.

# Thank you!



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