

## Anti-racist pedagogy: What does it look like in the classroom?

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### Abstract

*“Racism is a moral issue and of concern for moral educators, with recent social movements such as #BlackLivesMatter highlighting how far we are from obliterating racial oppression and the unearned privilege whiteness confers” (Lynch et al., 2017, p. 129). Vaines suggests that Home Economics is a profession grounded in morality, and one that is in a process of transformation (1997). Should this transformational process not, therefore, hold ongoing issues such as racism as a priority when developing clearer definitions of its mission and the pedagogical models that will enable this mission to be fulfilled? Much thought has gone into deconstructing the multicultural educational model and replacing it with the deliberately critical, anti-racist pedagogical approach, though there remains much room for development of this pedagogy in pre-tertiary education. Our paper provides an introduction to the theoretical principles of anti-racist pedagogy, what it means for students and teachers, as well as specific strategies and lessons that can be used within the Home Economics classroom.*

**KEYWORDS:** RACISM, ANTI-RACIST PEDAGOGY, SCHOOL AS HOME, HOME ECONOMICS, REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

### The school as our home

Teaching is a political act (Freire, 1972) that influences how students engage with society as citizens. For this reason, practitioners must reflect critically and remain grounded in the discomfort that comes when choosing transformative practice. This discomfort is familiar to the teaching home economist who must understand and integrate the complex webs of life into their craft. These diverse and intricate webs are interconnected, unifying us organically to each other and our environment (Vaines, 1994). Schools are one of the many living systems that constitute these webs and students bring to the classroom backpacks filled with the histories and values of the private spheres by which they have been cultured. Eleanore Vaines (1994) has taught us that the *World as our Home* metaphor presents a moral vision centered on deep care for one another. Applying this lens to anti-racist pedagogy, the *School as Our Home* implores teachers to take action. Anti-racist pedagogy uncovers and deconstructs hidden societal oppression and endeavours to mend the systems that perpetuate racial inequality amongst students and greater society.

### Deconstructing racism in schools

Although most educators are familiar with blatant racism, less obvious categories infiltrate our classrooms every day. Aversive racism describes the camouflaged biases that are embedded in class materials, curriculum and teaching strategies, as well as the grouping and tracking of students based on racial assumptions (Blakeney, 2005; Tatum, 1997). Cultural discontinuity, another form, can be seen when the cultural and ethnic values of students do not match the Eurocentric values of their schools, often leading to low motivation and communication issues (Blakeney, 2005; Taggart, 2017). Race, therefore, affects academic success, with research suggesting that students feel pressured to choose between belonging racially and being academically successful (Blakeney, 2005; Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators [OABSE], 2015).

Basque, K. M. & Britto, M. (2019). Anti-racist pedagogy: What does it look like in the classroom? *International Journal of Home Economics*, 12(2), 6-10.

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Another element of growing concern is the disparity between diverse student populations and racial diversity among teachers (Blakeney, 2005). This *teacher diversity gap* can lead to blocks and see underrepresented students at an academic disadvantage (Carr & Klassen, 1997; OABSE, 2015). For schools to be racially just, teachers need to develop competencies to address cultural and race issues as well as be supported by their community and administration (Priest et al., 2016).

### Defining anti-racist pedagogy

While the prevailing multicultural education model intends to celebrate diversity, it often proves to perpetuate stereotypes and feed a cycle of oppression (McMahon, 2003). Recognition of similarities and differences is important, however, an over-emphasis on difference—as embodied by multicultural education models—can limit understandings of certain groups as being *different but nice*, an attitude that does not equitably serve communities grappling with racially tense political climates (Pedersen & Walker, 2005).

Anti-racist pedagogy seeks to eliminate social oppression through reflection and action. This empowering and democratic practice is different from multicultural education as it actively challenges individual and systemic oppression at the interpersonal, institutional and cultural levels (Blakeney, 2005; OABSE, 2015). Anti-racist pedagogy promotes race-awareness, understandings of personal privilege and the development of a deep consciousness about how perceptions of race permeate our own and others' lives. It incites us to take action and to create a new anti-racist structure for society (Lynch, Swartz, & Isaacs, 2017).

### What does it mean to be an anti-racist pedagogue?

The anti-racist pedagogue *acts critically* and with intention by facilitating dialogue, questioning personal values, deconstructing whiteness and assuming heterogeneity (Blakeney, 2005; Haymes, 1995; McMahon, 2003). Anti-racist educators seek to preserve and translate language so that cultural meanings are deconstructed, mutually understood and accessible to all (McMahon, 2003; Ritchie, 1995). They are aware of—but not inhibited by—the potential discomforts that these practices will bring.

- i) The anti-racist pedagogue *engages their school community* by creating professional development opportunities to discuss personal and collective theories of racial identity, even if through the explicit use of hypothetical scenarios (Lawrence & Tatum, as cited in Blakeney, 2005). They make an effort to create an anti-racist policy alongside families and administration, while evaluating existing school policies and practices (Fairbanks, Dodds, Hall, Horner, & Peterat, 1994).
- ii) The anti-racist pedagogue *questions classroom practices*, critically evaluating who benefits from particular teaching/learning styles, and languages and reflecting on their own perceptions of academic success (Blakeney, 2005). They evaluate and re-write curriculum components to be heterogeneously inclusive and they make space for students to lead social change behaviours with empathy and morality (Fairbanks et al., 1994; Gay, 1995; McMahon, 2003).
- iii) The anti-racist pedagogue *sets the tone* by creating a safe and peaceful space to have meaningful, empathetic conversations about race (Davis-Manigaulte, Yorks, & Kasi, 2006). Listening skills are explicitly supported and time constraints are empathetically considered.

### Transforming the home economics classroom

While this pedagogical practice is largely about adopting an anti-racist mindset, we have designed a few learning experiences that apply the anti-racist mindset to the Home Economics classroom context. The ideas below are largely inspired by resources featured on the Oxfam Education, Resources for Rethinking and Teaching Tolerance Websites, whose URLs can be found in our reference section.

#### Reimagining the patchwork quilt

The Canadian mosaic metaphor is thought to reflect the attitudes and values about immigration and immigrants that permeate culture and perceptions. Redefining the Canadian mosaic metaphor in the

form of a patchwork quilt provides an opportunity to deconstruct and reconstruct perceptions of race within the classroom.

Students can be invited to represent their various ethnicities and cultures through the creation of a patch (with the alternative option of representing a musical, literary, ancestral or public figure). In sewing these pieces together using a Eurocentric *quilt block* design there arises an opportunity to comment on the relationships between pieces, represented by the strips of fabric between each block. These strips needn't be inconspicuous or understated—anti-racist pedagogy has arisen from the need to illuminate the relationships between the heterogeneous cultures and histories that make up our society and recognise how they have been ignored, suppressed and unrepresented. These strips require critical reflection in their formation—how can the tensions, neglect and misunderstandings of these relationships be represented? Students might choose to represent these according to a psychological colour spectrum (Dael, Perseguers, Marchand, Antonietti, & Mohr, 2016), texture spectrum or symbolic stitching method. Where a traditional quilt tends towards order and colour scheme in unifying the focal blocks, an emphasis on the joining strips and their representative messages might be considered anti-aesthetic. Just as the anti-aesthetic art movement grew out of anger towards society's ignorance regarding life's harsh realities and serious issues (Meyer & Ross, 2004), so too can this experience make space for relationships to be illuminated, juxtaposing the softness of a quilt with the hard questions it presents, to both the students engaging with it and the wider community.

### Seedfolks

*Seedfolks* is a children's novel by Paul Fleishman, documenting a chapter in the lives of a culturally diverse community in Cleveland. Through the planting of an urban garden a place is created where residents can share their personal stories of struggle and through empathy-building, a community is born (Resources for Rethinking, 2018). A critical evaluation of this story could serve as a provocation for the co-construction of an anti-racist project thread.

Students could begin on this journey by dividing the text into the thirteen chapters of its residents and sharing each story, inclusive of cultural nuances and struggles, through a language/medium of their choice. Through reflective discussion, led by critical questioning, students and teachers will have the opportunity to unpack, share and reshape their own perspectives of race, racism, immigration, ethnicity and more. Teachers could facilitate a culminating and continuing project in the establishment of a kitchen garden or produce plot, to further the perspectives gained through the investigation of *Seedfolks*. Students could source seeds from families to reflect the multitude of heritages represented, caring for them collaboratively and creating daily rituals that enable students to tune into their own and others' personal stories. Alternatively, students could be challenged to create a menu that uses culturally significant ingredients brought in from their respective homes.

In either case, time and attention must be granted to prioritize the process of critical reflection regarding these seeds, ingredients or foods. Food has historically been racialized through corporate and government policy and action as well as colonial attitudes: indigenous peoples have been robbed of their needs and rights to cultivate land (Van Teeseling, 2017); Communities of colour experience lower quality, variety and availability of preferred foods (Billings & Cabbil, 2011); Culturally diverse cuisine can perpetuate a culture of superficial tolerance for multiculturalism where perceptions of racial issues may otherwise remain negative (Keenan, 2015). Without critical reflection, these activities might only prove to meet a multicultural education agenda. Appropriately facilitated collaboration and dialogue, however, can provide opportunities to discuss issues such as cultural appropriation, the limitations of tolerance and food sovereignty, among other threads.

### Where does food come from?

While farmers' markets, urban gardens and other community initiatives advocate for a reconnection to food sourcing and supply chains, there remains a disconnect from the origins of our food. By unpacking a heterogeneous grocery bag students are presented with an opportunity to discuss their understandings, explore their assumptions and share their wonderings about the origins of what others and we eat (Oxfam Education, n. d.). This is an open-ended activity that can take many directions.

Teachers may like to predetermine their facilitation questions and direction before delving in, or employ a student-centred approach by responding to the directions in which the children lead discussion. A student-centred approach would enable teachers to explore students' existing perceptions and understandings, tuning in to the areas that will most interest students or enabling them pathways towards maximum growth. In either case, teachers will need to carefully consider the items they put into the bag to ensure that they enable students to compare and contrast their own perspectives with their peers as well as groups that may not be represented in the classroom. Focal points could include uncommon fresh ingredients, non-English labeled packages and non-Eurocentric quantity amounts. Questions and wondering statements should challenge students' perceptions related to countries of origin, race and ethnicity, language and culture. Extension activities could include taking students to the local supermarket, ethnic grocery store, farmers' market, or stores and markets that are farther afield, offering produce that they may not see locally.

### Conclusion and recommendations

The moral vision of the anti-racist pedagogue might be realized through Reflective Practice, an approach that Vaines suggests requires continual attention so that "the person committing herself/himself to becoming a moral/ethical person [can] comprehend the complexities of their commitment over time" (1997, part 1, para 7). Anti-racist pedagogy recognizes this need for continued attention and that emancipation from oppression must evolve, starting in the school as our home. It advocates for the empowerment of individuals and their communities to take a stand against the many ways that racism permeates the everyday lives of so many. By looking beyond our intentions and critically examining their effects can we take real action against racial inequity? Kendi suggests, "if the effect of a policy is an injustice or an inequity, it's racist... We no longer, the way we should be defining racist and antiracist, have to worry at all about intent" (NPR, 2019, n.p.).

The reality is that many school districts in Canada have anti-racist policies, but for several, the implementation is ineffective and needs more attention to move from policy to action (Centre for Race and Culture [CRC], 2013). We recommend three good practice steps to move anti-racist policies to action adapted from the Centre for Race and Culture (2013):

1. Implementation should be lead by anti-racist education from the district, including cultural competency training for students and staff as well as ongoing training and support to deal with racism.
2. A whole school [school as home] approach should be adopted by involving students, teachers and parents to partake in anti-racist initiatives.
3. Curriculum inequities should be addressed to reflect the diverse and unique cultural backgrounds of the region.

If, as Home Economists, we are to remain committed to the pursuit of a common good then we must continuously revisit our notion of what Home Economics should be, particularly its moral grounding and how it serves this mission (Vaines, 1997). By making space for heterogeneity we are able to tune into the many truths of our complex societies, embrace the diverse webs of life and be intentionally active in creating new stories for individuals that reflect morality, harmony and equality.

### Biographies

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