



## Antiracist Pedagogy: Definition, Theory, and Professional Development

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## ***Antiracist Pedagogy:***

### **Definition, Theory, Purpose and Professional Development**

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#### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to define Antiracist Pedagogy and establish it within the sociological framework of Critical Theory. Antiracist Pedagogy is a paradigm located within Critical Theory utilized to explain and counteract the persistence and impact of racism. This paper indicates the need for the establishment of Antiracist Pedagogy within the school curriculum as well as the necessary professional development required to implement Antiracist Pedagogy effectively.

#### **Definition**

Antiracist Pedagogy is a paradigm located within Critical Theory utilized to explain and counteract the persistence and impact of racism using praxis as its focus to promote social justice for the creation of a democratic society in every respect.

Antiracist Pedagogy and Multicultural Education are frequently interchanged; however, upon examining the three major models of Multicultural Education (Kailin, 2002): the Assimilationist Model, the Integrationist Model and the Cultural Pluralism Model. Antiracist Pedagogy distinguishes itself critically from Multicultural Education. The Assimilationist Model provides for the merging of immigrants into American culture based on the melting pot theory; however, the distinguishing characteristic of color makes this unacceptable for people of color. The basis of the Integrationist Model is the provision of opportunity for participating in American society; however, this model fails to address the problem of racism's impact on opportunity. The basis of The Cultural Pluralism Model is mutual accommodation for the goal of

productivity, which proceeds to assimilation; however, with regard to people of color, theories associated with cultural depravity surface to explain their failure to follow the socioeconomic patterns of upward mobility. Antiracist pedagogy is expansive enough to include what each of the three models of Multicultural Education excludes. In order for one to assimilate into a society via the Assimilationist Model, one must adopt the racial identity of the dominant culture. When the dominant culture is physically similar, as is the case with European immigrants, the task is possible; however, it is never without the cost of losing cultural customs and traditions and nearly impossible for people of color. The distinguishing feature of color always remains. The distinguishing characteristic of color does not limit Antiracist Pedagogy, and it deals specifically and directly with the problem of racism.

Antiracist Pedagogy makes provision for understanding the impact of race on opportunity as well as the cultural differences associated with upward mobility patterns by focusing on the constructs of these inequalities. Antiracist Pedagogy also addresses the historical constructs that facilitate inequalities and seeks to create an antiracist paradigm that in time will serve to historically condition a new antiracist society. Antiracist Pedagogy includes explicit instruction on confronting racism without reservation or risk of ostracism, both of which are necessary in a society that mandates the purpose of public education as the production of democratic citizenry. Antiracist Pedagogy aims at transformation by challenging the individual as well as the structural system that perpetuates racism (Kailin, 2002). Antiracist Pedagogy avoids a perspective that views the issues and concerns of the group from a holistic perspective due to the intricacies and uniqueness of issues and concerns of each group.

## Theoretical Perspective

Antiracist Pedagogy is born out of social oppression and the inability of current social theory to improve the resulting oppression, which requires interpretation from the Critical Theory perspective of sociology. Antiracist pedagogy assists in the elimination of social oppression through the revelation of its oppressive nature, which is in keeping with the goal of Critical Theory. Critical Theory draws on the methods of interpretative theory as well. According to interpretive theory, indi-

viduals act and interact based on perceived meaning; therefore, one cannot expect the elimination of racist behavior without a change in perceived meaning. Antiracist pedagogy has the potential to cause a paradigm shift, which will facilitate a change in perceived meaning. The works of Apple (1979, 2000), Dewey (1987), Freire (1994, 2000) and Giroux (1983, 1992) are prominent in Antiracist Pedagogy.

Antiracist Pedagogy is born out of the meshing of Multicultural Education and Critical Pedagogy. This meshing creates a framework, which allows for the development of ideology associated with Antiracist Pedagogy. The type of ideology associated with Antiracist Pedagogy provides a method for addressing race, ethnicity, power and class. Such an ideology becomes a reflection of an individual consciousness relative to the dynamics of a racist society. In addition, ideology associated with Antiracist Pedagogy reveals the creators of racist ideologies, how long they prevail and whom they serve. The ideology of Antiracist Pedagogy is a tool for analysis, which helps to identify the principles of structure that allow individuals to navigate between the dominant society and daily life events. The ideology of Antiracist Pedagogy has, as its basis the development of consciousness related to how society operates with regard to race. Development of this consciousness is the result of an in-depth comprehension of the impact of racism and the experiences of racism. This also allows for the development of a voice for expressing the impact of racism, which in turn allows analysis of racism.

Freire's conscientization is a level of consciousness that allows you to see yourself as part of the world community. As a member of the world community, you are compelled to transform the world for the betterment of all world citizens. Antiracist Pedagogy allows one to act on the world in an effective manner that yields transformation of the world. Transformation is accomplished through reflection and action, praxis (Freire, 2000). This transformation yields a level of consciousness that culturally and historically conditions the members of the society. The effectiveness of this cultural and historical conditioning results in varying levels of consciousness. Antiracist Pedagogy is also a form of problem-posing education as outlined by Freire (2000) based on praxis and critical perception of reality being dynamic and responsive to transformation. This critical perception of reality is driven by dialogue that "awakens awareness" (p. 127) thereby creating knowledge that is a critical perception of reality capable of explaining reality

(Freire, 1994). Antiracist Pedagogy is a reflection of the oppression defined by the oppressed that allows for a change in the reality of oppression by those impacted negatively by its resulting racism. Praxis on racism takes place among the members within the context of the society resulting in the revelation of the critical perception of the racist society. The resulting knowledge explains and most importantly transforms the society through antiracist behaviors. Praxis on racism allows for the development of levels of consciousness that result in varying levels of antiracist behaviors among the members of the society. Antiracist behaviors allows for historical and cultural transformation of the world theoretically. Antiracist Pedagogy can produce such a transformation, a paradigm shift, resulting in various levels of consciousness that allow members of society to exhibit varying levels of antiracist behaviors; thereby, creating an antiracist paradigm.

Antiracist Pedagogy challenges the individual to take on a Deweyan perspective regarding democracy through inquiry, experimentation and reflection; thereby, providing the opportunity to make changes based on current conditions (Thompson, 2002). Inquiry and experimentation represent action and when coupled with reflection represent praxis. Antiracist pedagogy allows for the consideration of the perspectives of others within their current context, which in turn creates a broadened knowledge base of others and identifies common interests, which is indicative of democratic citizenry. This Deweyan perspective is reflective of the problem-posing educational nature of Antiracist Pedagogy where praxis and the critical perception of reality combine to transform that reality based on the expanded, shared knowledge base and the current conditions.

## Purpose and Necessity

Several prevailing catalysts within society, which perpetuate racism and its impact, support the need for Antiracist Pedagogy. These catalysts are opportunities for implementation of Antiracist Pedagogy. Each catalyst provides opportunity for praxis, conscientization and transformation within the context of problem-posing education from the perspective of the oppressed. These catalysts raise the level of consciousness for the oppressed demonstrating Freire's conscientization,

which allows the oppressed to perceive themselves as world citizens and compels the oppressed to act for transformation of the world

### *Types of Racism as Catalysts*

Tatum (1999) defines aversive racism as a form of subtle racism composed of stereotypes and racial biases. Aversive racism in education manifests itself as institutional racism observed in selection of curriculum and teachers; tracking or categorization of students from racially marginalized groups in special education classes at a disproportionate number; and, teaching practices and expectations. Negative images of people of color displayed in popular culture create institutional racism according to Kailin (2002). This type of institutional racism creates a perception of targeted groups as disadvantaged and subject to negative outcomes, which intensify and support racism. These conduits of racism systematically and effectively exclude students from educational opportunities and its concomitant benefits (Irvine, 1991). Presented in a problem-posing context, examples of these types of racism allow for praxis, conscientization and transformation.

### *Cultural Discontinuity as a Catalyst*

Asante (as cited in Irvine, 1991) describes cultural discontinuity as resulting when the cultures of students of color do not match the predominately-Eurocentric school culture. This mismatch causes clashes of verbal and nonverbal communication resulting in misinterpretation and misunderstanding between teachers and students. Merton (as cited in Irvine) describes self-fulfilling prophecy as the bringing to fruition a false definition based on a communicated expectation; thereby, making the false definition true. Merton believes this concept exists due to structural components of society. In a problem-posing context, members of different cultures view examples of verbal and nonverbal communication from other cultures. These meanings discussed and interpreted through the lens of each culture restructure the structural components of society to create an antiracist self-fulfilling prophecy through praxis, conscientization and transformation.

*Perspectives of Race as Catalysts*

Banks, Fordham, and Ogbu (as cited in Carter & Goodwin, 1994) purport the significance of race in education from three perspectives. Banks indicates that effective integration of culture and ethnicity into the curriculum can only occur through confronting race and implementing strategies that change negative attitudes towards race. Fordham indicates that students must choose between race and academic success due to the perception that academic success indicates abandonment of racial integrity for whiteness. Ogbu declares that the caste-like status of race is an obstacle to academic success based on the perception that race reflects academic ability. Each of these perspectives is an opportunity for posing problems within context. The impact of negative perspectives on race within a problem-posing context also allow for praxis, conscientization and transformation of negative perspectives to positive perspectives.

*Issues and Concerns about Race as Catalysts*

Dilg (1999) describes the effect of a course designed to address culture and race on adolescents. The outcomes indicate that adolescents have the desire to know and understand the issues surrounding culture and race. She also indicates that this type of study is “complex, difficult, awkward, painful, and in many ways unfamiliar” (p. 98), but necessary for psychological and social development and commitment to social justice. For example, racial and cultural issues experienced by adolescents represent problems posed within context and allow for a very natural flow of praxis, conscientization and transformation of issues surrounding race and culture. Adolescents would address these issues using praxis. Praxis typically results in consciousness raising, which reflects psychological and social development. Commitment to social justice is a manifestation of conscientization, as it would demonstrate their transformative response to their racial and cultural issues.

*Demographics as Catalysts*

Rosenberg (1998) indicates a pressing need for Antiracist Pedagogy given the demographics of education. The population of school children is becoming increasingly diverse while the racial composition of

preservice teachers is 90% white. Houston, Ligons, and Rosodo (1998) Houston et al., (1998) indicate that ignoring race instructionally or relationally or focusing exclusively on race can result in under achievement. The effect of these teachers given their white dominant perspective is undeterminable for the diverse populations they will be instructing. For example, what happens when a well-intentioned teacher with a white dominant perspective chooses to ignore race, does she not in effect ignore a part of who the student is? Students may perceive such an attitude as an indicator of their cultural deprivation or incapacity for upward social mobility. Demographics too represent problems posed within context and allow for a very natural flow for praxis, conscientization and transformation. Through praxis, conscientization and transformation teachers can develop attitudes that better support students within their cultural contexts. For example, the teacher presents the current demographics to students in a diverse classroom and explains that her goal is for everyone to function optimally in this diverse setting. In the context, problem becomes discovering how the teacher and the students will work together to achieve the goal of optimal functioning for all.

The use of knowledge, reflection and action defines praxis. Using praxis as its focus, Antiracist Pedagogy is theoretically capable of eliminating these prevailing catalysts of racism in society, ensuring that diversity is promoted and respected and creating a context for promoting social justice and promulgating understanding and acceptance, the fruits of social justice. If indeed the purpose of public education is the production of democratic citizenry, then the implementation of Antiracist Pedagogy serves to counteract the catalysts that persist in perpetuating racism and its negative impact in education. The catalysts presented clearly indicate the purpose and necessity for Antiracist Pedagogy.

## Professional Development

An essential factor in the successful implementation of Antiracist Pedagogy is professional development. Untrained teachers will not be able to implement Antiracist Pedagogy successfully due to its foundation in Critical Theory and the significance of the ideology associated with Antiracist Pedagogy. In addition, lack of training will hinder An-



tiracist Pedagogy to a superficial status accompanied by misapplication of its theoretical principals. Crucial to successful professional development in Antiracist Pedagogy is praxis. Effective professional development will address historical and cultural investigation of racism and development of racial identity. Professional development will also encompass methods of teaching and for this reason; it is advantageous to consider culturally responsive instruction with regarding the implementation of Antiracist Pedagogy.

In terms of professional development, Brown (2002) indicates several areas for consideration. From an epistemological perspective, she states that teachers should begin with an investigation of racism from a cultural and historical perspective followed by a personal perspective, reflective of what Freire describes as being in the world. She challenges teachers to discover how racist ideology has influenced and permeated society. Specifically, this entails investigating the theories of racial identity, which describe the personal and interpersonal processes a person progresses through to develop a group identity associated with a particular racial heritage. Knowledge of these theories will assist teachers in dealing with the cognitive dissonance created due to the emotional nature of racism as well as provide them a foundation for the implementation of Antiracist Pedagogy. Another addition, which will support this growing foundation, is a comprehensive understanding of the systemic perpetuating nature of racism and its accompanying language. Brown clearly indicates that workshops are insufficient and that appropriate professional development must consist of praxis. Classroom implementation will require extensive skills in "active listening, conflict mediation, and conflict management" (p. 2). Brown encourages the exposure of preservice teachers to the discussed concepts combined with an extensive liberal arts core in order to prepare them adequately for teaching diverse populations. In order to achieve these goals, professional development and teacher education will require extensive restructuring. It would mean recognizing the significance that changing demographics has on the educational setting. It would mean responding proactively to change rather than the traditional reactive stance educators take when the change becomes a crisis.

Carter and Goodwin (1994) assert that teachers must be aware of their own racial identity before they transform their own expectations, misconceptions, naiveté, presumptions and prejudices with regard to people of color; therefore, Carter and Goodwin (1994) encourage the

implementation of racial identity theory in the curriculum of preservice teachers. Tatum (1999) expands on this concept of racial identity indicating the importance of professional development for effective navigation of the levels of consciousness related to racial identity theory, particularly the development of a white racial identity. Ineffective professional development can result in teachers relapsing to and becoming deeply entrenched in the familiar making the progress null and void. The effectiveness of this type of professional development is also dependent on white teachers finding white allies who can reflect the positive nature of their new reality. Effective professional development on racism results in white teachers having an awareness that is transformative and allows them to engage in praxis with regard to racism. The result for white teachers undertaking this type of professional development is effectiveness in diverse settings, a goal of Antiracist Pedagogy.

Lawrence and Tatum (1997) conducted semester long professional development with white teachers that focused on Antiracist Pedagogy. Two essential factors facilitating its success were explicit intention to discuss race and the dialogic nature of the professional development. An example of explicit intention to discuss race in a dialogic professional development setting would be the presentation of a scenario that involves the interaction between persons of differing races and their interpretation of what took place. The scenario is nonthreatening and provides an opportunity for representatives of the differing races to share their interpretation of the scenario. Participating in this type of dialogue allows for the presentation of different perspectives and interpretations. The end result is transformative when each is able to see the others' point of view. These key factors both exemplify characteristics imbedded in Antiracist Pedagogy due to their provision for praxis, conscientization, and transformation. The outcome of this type of professional development was successful because the participants were able to move beyond intentionality to implementation concerning diversity so that all students were empowered. The participants were also able to extend themselves to students of color and involve their parents. The efforts of the participants resulted in administrative support as well.

The fact that Antiracist Pedagogy is rooted in Critical Theory (Sleeter & Bernal, 2002) necessitates that teachers receive professional development that avoids reduction of Critical Theory to method and technique. In order to effectively develop consciousness relative to the

dynamics of a hegemonic society and participate in analysis of hegemonic behavior, teachers must ground themselves in the ideology associated with Antiracist Pedagogy. Such an ideology provides a method for recognizing and addressing issues of race, ethnicity, power and class. These teachers as adults have solidified belief systems; therefore, the approach must be nonthreatening and nonaccusatory. Children's literature is a very viable method for presenting issues of race, ethnicity, power and class. For example, Deborah Wiles' (2001) *Freedom Summer* provides an accurate depiction of segregation through the eyes of a child, as well as the impact of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Professional development must ensure that practical guidance avoids sacrificing theory as well as the tendency to interpret Critical Theory along the lines of class thereby marginalizing race. Solórzano (as cited in Bernal & Sleeter) encourages the conceptualization of Critical Theory as a developing strategy with the goal of eliminating racism and its impact in society within the context of eliminating other forms of oppression. The complexities of Critical Theory and the ideology of Antiracist Pedagogy dictate that the appropriate context for developing these concepts be praxis driven and problem-posing in order to create a critical perception of a the racist society.

Culturally responsive instruction/pedagogy has two perspectives. One perspective refers to what teachers do in the classroom when they are instructing students, the other to what preservice teachers experience while learning to instruct. Irvine (1992) points to the significantly changing demographics of school culture as a requirement for preservice teachers to be equipped to instruct effectively using culturally responsive instruction/pedagogy. She contends that there should be teacher education courses designed for this purpose. Irvine also contends that this reformation effort must extend to schools in order to create environments that receive and support culturally responsive teachers. Irvine purports that in order for these courses to be effective, preservice teachers must be surrounded by diverse teacher education faculty that exemplify successful incorporation and modeling of culturally-responsive instruction/pedagogy. She encourages schools of teacher education to increase the number of diverse faculty members and to utilize praxis to identify ways their "climates, policies, and formal and informal practices" (p. 87) support or fail to support diverse faculty members. Schools of teacher education create and maintain the prescribed environment by ascribing to Antiracist Pedagogy.

The social relationship between teacher and student define culturally responsive instruction/pedagogy. While there are no specific methods or techniques, there are identifying characteristics. Irvine (1991) describes culturally responsive instruction/pedagogy in terms of high teacher expectation and refusal to group children according to academic, socioeconomic, or social performance. Student failure is corrected by redesign and reteaching to facilitate learning. Brophy and Williams (as cited in Irvine) describe this behavior as a form of coaching characterized by modeling, practice and feedback, praxis. Culturally responsive teachers are extremely efficient classroom managers that utilize strategic planning to meet the needs of students, well organized and maximize instructional time. Ladson-Billings (1994) characterizes culturally responsive instruction/pedagogy according to a different set of characteristics; however, they are reflective of the same social relationship between teacher and student. Fluid and equitable interaction that extends from the school environment to the community environment characterizes this social relationship. This relationship exists within a learning community where the teacher exhibits connection to all students and encourages collaborative learning. This type of social relationship can only exist where there is sufficient dialogue to create a level of consciousness capable of creating a community of learners based on fluid and equitable interaction thereby making it indicative of Antiracist Pedagogy.

### **Antiracist Pedagogy Professional Development: An Example**

Professional development in Antiracist Pedagogy for teachers might begin with dialogue surrounding the dynamics of white social dominance: white is right, white ignorance, white privilege and how they interact to perpetuate a white dominant culture that in turn perpetuates aversive racism manifested as institutional racism. The context of such a discussion would be praxis driven and problem posing. For example, teachers given an example of each of the dynamics of white social dominance would interpret them. After sharing their interpretations, the teachers would view an interpretation from a group or groups that view them as oppressive. The ensuing dialogue should produce conscientization through praxis. In addition, it should provide that critical perception of the racist society and the resulting levels of

consciousness, which inspire teachers to develop antiracist behavior. Development of antiracist behaviors allows for transformation of the world through cultural reconditioning followed by eventual historical reconditioning.

Using a praxis approach with children's literature, teachers can become aware of the impact racism has on society, enabling them to reinforce a critical perception of racist society by encompassing the view of the oppressed. The use of children's literature also provides an effective model of culturally responsive instruction that teachers can observe, then model as they learn to implement culturally responsive instruction in the classroom with students. Children's literature is one of the most effective means for exposing people to the culture of others and promoting respect for differences. It highlights the aspects of individual cultures and provides a means for linking every culture to the curriculum. The easily understood format of children's literature is also a powerful medium for illustrating the negative impact of racism on individuals and society. The result of these types of professional development activities would provide teachers with the skills necessary to prevent institutional racism in schools, and equip teachers with the ability to provide effective culturally responsive instruction/pedagogy.

## Conclusion

Antiracist Pedagogy is a complex paradigm established within the sociological framework of Critical Theory. There is a need for the implementation of Antiracist Pedagogy when one examines closely the catalysts within society that perpetuate racism and its impact. Professional development is crucial to successful implementation of Antiracist Pedagogy for the following reasons: the ideology associated with it; development of racial identity; and, ability to instruct using culturally responsive instruction. The example of professional development in Antiracist Pedagogy is not fully developed nor is it inclusive of all required elements for successful development; however, it does expose the deficiencies in the current curriculum and move towards correcting them. The concepts presented in the paper are for advancing the conversation in the field of antiracist education and teacher education as well as providing some concept of what will create a paradigm shift designed and envisioned toward development of an antiracist society.

It also hopes to serve as a call to action for the serious direction of endeavors that lead to an antiracist society.

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