



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2021 Volume II: Developing Anti-Racist Curriculum and Pedagogy

Introduction

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The summer of 2020 sparked a series of reckonings among many educators about the role of race and racism in public school curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom culture. Teachers and schools endorsed new statements of solidarity. Promises of personal reflection proliferated. Yet even among teachers committed to anti-racist education, a central challenge remains. In the words of teacher educator Meredith Sinclair, how do teachers move from “disposition” to “manifestation,” or from attitude to practice? And more particularly, what does it mean for teachers in diverse fields—math education, language arts, music—to transform the ways they teach, design curriculum, and engage students through an anti-racist framework?

These questions animated the work of 11 New Haven teachers in “Developing Anti-Racist Curriculum and Pedagogy.” The seminar began by exploring the ways that K-12 education in general and the academic disciplines in particular have been organized around ideas of racial colorblindness, objectivity, and neutrality, often denying any connection to racial power or contemporary inequality. Yet a closer investigation reveals a far more complicated relationship. Many academic disciplines in the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences have their origins in white supremacy, Eugenics, and nativism, and continue to bear those legacies today. Indeed public education, with its histories and ongoing practices of race and class segregation, tracking, intelligence testing, unequal funding, and heavy-handed discipline policies, have never been color-blind or apolitical.

As the seminar progressed, participants considered the ways these racialized histories have shaped dominant approaches to teaching and learning in their own subject areas. Why, for example, are most approaches to math education rooted in processes of hierarchy and sorting that label some students as capable and adept while leaving many others frustrated and disinterested in math? Why do the dominant approaches to music education and performance often focus on a single tradition of European classical music and similarly rank students into rigid orders of “genius” and failure? Many other fields, from science education to expository writing to foreign language instruction, bear similar patterns and outcomes.

The curriculum units produced by Fellows demonstrate how teachers in these subject fields can reimagine and transform their curriculum and pedagogy to engage students in complex modes of learning that do not reproduce long-standing structures of inequality and disposability.

For example, music educator Henry Lugo’s unit, **“Anti-Racist Pedagogy and Counter-Narrative Repertoire for the Middle School Orchestra”** reimagines orchestral instruction and music history and provides teachers with new arrangements to broaden the musical repertoire they can introduce to students. Lauren O’Brien’s unit, **“Using Multilingual, Immigrant, and Refugee Students’ Voices to Disrupt**

Racism in English Language Instruction” helps to “disrupt the racist ideas that permeate teaching English as a ‘second’ language (ESL)” through an inventive set of pedagogies.

Amy Brazauski’s **“Rethinking Social Justice Research in the High School ELA Classroom,”** draws on a range of influences, including Critical Race Theory and Cultural Community Wealth to facilitate student engagements with difficult social and political issues, culminating in a public Social Justice Symposium and website.

Marco Cenabre’s unit, **“Recentering Humanity: An Anti-Racist Approach to Narrative Writing”** aspires to transform futile “approaches to writing instruction that attempt to teach the TikTok generation to sound like Henry David Thoreau.” Cenabre emphasizes collective practices of writing and expression centered in “academic rigor and collective joy” driven by the genuine experiences of students.

Rose Murphy’s **“Environmental Justice in Literature: Review, Resistance, Renaissance”** likewise challenges the dominant racism-blind orientation to the study of literature about the environment and focuses instead on the resources and creativity that subordinated groups have brought to address environmental issues and futures.

Val Karanxha’s unit, **“The Legacy of Francophonie in Post-Colonial Africa”** encourages French language instructors to draw on the vast cultural, linguistic and social repository of Francophone Africa as an alternative to the focus in traditional second language instruction on formal grammar and linguistics divorced from histories of colonialism, racial formation, and social identity.

Anti-racist curriculum and pedagogy also have generative uses in math education and statistics, as demonstrated by the units by William McKinney and Kathleen Rooney. Rooney’s **“Seeing Race in Statistics”** and McKinney’s **“Eyes Wide Open: E(race)ing Color-Blindness in the Math Classroom”** both counter the prevailing color-blind and power-blind approaches that characterize these fields while developing the necessary skill-based competencies among students.

The last three units are authored by middle school teachers, demonstrating the importance and applicability of anti-racist curriculum and pedagogy for students before they reach high school. Carolyn Streets’ **“The House On Mango Street: Examining Race, Racism, and Power”** places the widely taught novel by Sandra Cisneros into a framework attentive to questions of culture, identity formation and inequality.

Felicia Fountain’s unit for eighth grade social studies students, **“Invisible Incidences in America-The Great Migration and Destruction of Thriving Black Communities”** examines issues of racial violence, dispossession, community formation and resistance across the 20th century, rooted in a range of innovative pedagogical techniques.

Finally Dena Vaillancourt’s **“Adding Race Consciousness to the Slavery Curriculum”** similarly supports students in understanding the complex ways that white supremacy and racial formation nurtured the development of slavery in the United States, while helping students to contemplate the legacies of these systems today.

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