



Suturing the Break: An Anti-Racist Pedagogy Column

Raquel Baker

*What kind of education will it take to grow the society we want to have?
One that is as collaborative as it is liberatory.*

Centering anti-racist teaching practices is a necessary part of growing the society we want to have. In this column, I offer some of the issues that animate my thinking about anti-racist pedagogy. I am trying to cultivate an anti-racist pedagogical practice that is

Collaborative

This one is hard! See *Decolonial* here. Because students and faculty -- and humans in a society -- operate within uneven power relations (and histories and institutions and systems) that operate outside of us but that *also allow us to make sense to each other*, centering an analysis of power is necessary when creating anti-racist pedagogical approaches. Collaborative methods aim to create multivocal, generative spaces. Interdisciplinary, and in other ways multiple, perspectives allow us to center different questions; consider different entry points; and use different reference texts and methods among other generative synergies, disruptions, and co-creations. Collaboration that contributes to anti-racist transformation requires constant reflection on how decision-making occurs within a project. Anti-racist pedagogy is relational work in which you have to co-build embodied languages and spaces in which people can do heart work and be *vulnerable with themselves and be open to others and engaging across differences* in power and awareness of how oppression operates in the everyday – which is already embedded in economic systems and everyday decisions about how resources are used and invested within academic spaces. Collaborative work is relational work in which we interrogate power dynamics and build new languages and spaces of belonging. Which is to say interpersonal dynamics are related to structural and institutional power, and creating dialogic spaces with students in age appropriate ways means asking hard questions about how we share power and changing teaching practices to redistribute power and reinvest in marginalized communities that are targets of oppressive power.

Inquiry-Driven

I aim for an antiracist pedagogy that is process-driven, relationship-building centered, and aimed at developing a mindset—even to the point of not setting the topic and encouraging students to research

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what stokes their intellectual curiosity. Within this frame, education becomes about checking in, getting to know each other, and developing processes to allow us to speak and listen deeply when we are tired, confused, anxious, bored, uncomfortable emotionally or physically, or something else. Such an educational environment is not a test-driven environment nor one in which I even see myself as delivering content. We, my students and I, are learning methods—how to find resources in a library database, how to skim articles to see if they would be useful to read more deeply—to help us develop better analysis on which to make claims and form knowledge based on what we find and then think through in discussion with each other. Our work together should transform my original aims or questions and values and desires as a teacher – our work is multidirectional, not just something I “give” to “students” but ways of understanding the world, ideas, and texts that we have thought through together. My anti-racist pedagogy is grounded in a Freirean frame: Knowledge itself is a collaborative process that changes you and the world. I aim for an anti-racist pedagogy that engages students in that process in meaningful ways and moves education from a disciplinary process about limits to a collaborative process of examination that allows students to construct new possibilities, identifications, and ways of being.

Decolonial

Anti-racist pedagogy aims to disrupt, deconstruct, and provide methods to heal from the structures of minority rule that constrict us. The everydayness of enslavement and settlement lives in our bodies and informs our knowledges of our selves and the world. The material practices and cultural institutions of our contemporary slave-enabled, settler colonial world inform the identifications we move through the world with. I speak as a Black educator in the United States of America, living and unlearning on land with integral ancestral and ongoing historical relationship to Chumash peoples. Anti-colonial thinker and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon writes about internalized inferiority—the way that colonized peoples come to internalize the lack of value they have within their cultural own milieu. A robust anti-racist pedagogy is about structural critique and healing, constructive transformation. It involves working toward changes in policy outside of the classroom. Inside the classroom, it requires acknowledging the material damages caused by our contemporary identifications and ways of being and creating space to reflect on and transform that violence. Anti-racist pedagogy is one tool with the space of the classroom. It works inside to prepare us emotionally and materially in terms of building languages, spaces of inquiry and engagement, and knowledges together. It works with policy and systemic change. Such change includes rethinking the model of how education is financed, how it is invested in (which is a matter of educational policy), as well as the broader economic practices and institutions in which we as larger national and global cultures are situated within. Which is to say that that the graduation gap, outcome gap, completion gap, success gap, opportunity gap in education is related to the extractive histories of settler colonialism that ground ongoing divestment based on racialized modes of knowledge and inequitable spatial practices (think apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s or in the USA in 2020, the icon of Jim Crow in the American South, or La Colonia in Oxnard). A decolonial approach to anti-racist pedagogy centers radical investment in healing from fracturing institutional, cultural, state, economic, spatial, and educational practices. A decolonial anti-racist pedagogy requires making practices that support systemic oppression visible and developing new practices, which, it turns out, is always related to developing new modes of identification.

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Future-Oriented

An anti-racist pedagogy aims to teach toward our futures – to help to create the conditions of possibility for more sustainable and equitable futures. It seeks to transform oppressive, maladaptive, negating practices, identifications, and imaginaries that our racialized practices give rise to. It seeks to help transform racialized trauma. The investment of anti-racist pedagogy seeds our entire academic community: our students, faculty, staff, groundskeepers, service workers, contract workers, food workers, and the larger communities in which we are all situated. Our histories, migrations, and family and community stories are sources of knowledge that help us become who we need to be to build meaningful and ethical ways of being together. Anti-racist pedagogy is part of the project of creating new selves because education as a project is deeply imbricated with identity.

About the Author

Raquel Baker is an assistant professor of postcolonial and transnational literatures in the English program at California State University Channel Islands and will be teaching a course on reparations and reconciliations in black and indigenous literatures in Spring 2021.