

Dialoguing about Race and Racism

Overview

Anti-racist pedagogy requires us to take an active role as instructors regarding how we broach topics of equity, justice, inclusion, and power in our classrooms. Our classrooms do not operate in vacuums and students bring in lived experiences that are not left at the door when they enter the classroom space. Additionally, having critical conversations about race should not be relegated to courses that only fall under the race and ethnicity requirement. However, incorporating discussions on racial issues in your classroom requires a great deal of self-reflection, preparation, learning, patience, and commitment. We may be reluctant to engage in dialogue about race in the classroom and that is understandable. This work can be uncomfortable, but it is more important to have these conversations than to preserve our comfort. While there may be discomfort, how we set up our classroom and discussion guidelines can help us prepare for moments of tension and potential conflict.

This resource guide aims to provide instructors with both an overview of race, including its construction and historical context as well as ways to mobilize this information to have deeper interactions with others, particularly students in the classroom, around race. This resource guide will be a starting place for some and a supplement for others. Additional resources are provided for further reading and development, as we are always looking to grow our knowledge. Furthermore, this guide moves beyond topics of diversity and multiculturalism, as “these courses are often simplistic or celebratory in their discussion of diversity and they fail to provide an analysis of the political, institutional, and ideological structures that underpin discrimination and social disparities” (Kishimoto and St. Clair, 2010, p. 22). Thus, conversations about race must interrogate and analyze systems of power, oppression, and privilege that exist inside and outside of the classroom. Being mindful of the different identities in a given classroom is an important consideration, as we must create space to discuss classroom dynamics around [dominant narratives](#) and ideologies.

This resource guide is not intended to act as a gatekeeper regarding who should teach about race, how one should teach about race, or what one should teach about race. Additionally, the information provided in this guide does not supplant a person’s lived experience regarding racism. Traditional classrooms do not support incorporating meaningful dialogue about race into your classroom. Creating a space in which students can make connections between their lives and class content rather than promoting the “Eurocentric model of teaching where teaching is seen as objective” (Kishimoto and St. Clair, 2010, p. 20) is an important component of anti-racist pedagogy. Maintaining traditional classroom structures and hierarchies can be counterproductive, as Ochoa and Pineda (2008) state: “Personal experiences may be trivialized as anecdotes or as irrelevant to the course material, while academic theories and “facts” are perceived as more rigorous and important” (p. 46).

	<p>Lastly, and most importantly, before engaging in this work with students, we must first recognize and reflect on our positionality. We must also begin to develop and grow our knowledge before entering into a dialogue about race with students. Engaging in anti-racist pedagogy is about growth and process over time. We do not arrive at a final destination but are constantly engaging in analysis, action, and reflection.</p> <p>Citations:</p> <p>Ochoa, G.L., & Pineda, D. (2008). Deconstructing Power, Privilege, and Silence in the Classroom. <i>Radical History Review</i>, Issue 102 (Fall 2008): 45-62. DOI 10.1215/01636545-2008-012</p> <p>St Clair, D., & Kishimoto, K. (2010). Decolonizing Teaching: A cross-curricular and collaborative model for teaching about race in the university. <i>Multicultural Education</i>, 18(1), 18-24. Retrieved from: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ916842</p>
<p>Goals</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To provide a brief overview of the historical context of how race developed and is defined in the U.S. 2) To provide instructors with an overview of dialoguing about race and racism in the classroom. 3) To provide concepts and strategies for dialoguing about race and racism in the classroom. 4) To encourage an ongoing process of reflexivity while engaging in anti-racism practices.
<p>Anti-Racist Pedagogy Principles</p>	<p>The following anti-racist pedagogy principles are incorporated into this resource guide. For a review of the six principles of anti-racist pedagogy, visit our Practicing Anti-Racist Pedagogy homepage.</p> <p>Principle 1: Anti-racist pedagogy acknowledges racism in disciplinary, institutional, departmental contexts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding dialogue regarding how racism shows up in different departments and disciplines is necessary. Acknowledging how racism shows up in these spaces is critical as we seek to make them more inclusive and equitable. <p>Principle 2: Anti-racist pedagogy centers both structural and personal manifestations of racism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialoguing about race and racism requires us to examine and discuss racism on multiple levels, including how it operates in and outside the classroom. Dialogue requires us to be self-reflexive as we critically examine our relationship to racism in these different contexts.

	<p>Principle 3: Anti-racist pedagogy disrupts racism whenever/wherever it occurs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key component of intergroup dialogue is calling others in as opposed to calling them out. When we hear something harmful to the group or an individual, we implement different strategies to maintain the dignity of the commenter while acknowledging the harm that was caused. <p>Principle 4: Anti-racist pedagogy seeks change within and beyond the classroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding a dialogue on issues such as race and racism brings us to our learning edge. It is in our learning edge that we can open ourselves up to hearing perspectives that differ from our own and consider alternatives to deeply held beliefs. Another important component of dialogue is that students act on what they have learned or heard from others. <p>Principle 5: Anti-racist pedagogy bridges theory and practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergroup dialogue and dialogic techniques develop through research, theory, and practice. The strategies and tools outlined in this resource guide borrow from intergroup dialogue and years of pedagogical practice and experience from practitioners. <p>Principle 6: Anti-racist pedagogy focuses on the importance of process over time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although it is recognized that sustaining a dialogue over time is challenging, we must strive to make dialoguing with each other a more common feature and practice in the classroom. It is also necessary that instructors develop their facilitation skills over time as well. Mistakes will be made along the way, and we are always seeking ways to develop our dialogic techniques and practice.
<p>Implementation</p>	<p>Before engaging students in dialogue or activities about race, instructors must begin the work of their own critical self-reflection. Exploring race should not be taken lightly, and we should not be asking students to engage in this topic if we have not already started exploring and reflecting on this topic.</p> <p>Examining race and practicing anti-racist pedagogy requires us to do our work related to topics of privilege, oppression, and systemic inequities. Our resource guide, "Doing One's Own Personal Work on Privilege and Oppression," provides additional insight, readings, and strategies for those looking to become more critically self-reflective. Although it may be unintentional, there can be harm caused to students if we do not properly educate ourselves on this topic.</p> <p>When you feel confident to dialogue about race and racism with students, facilitating group dialogue is a critical skill to possess. Our resource guide, "Useful Questions for Dialogue Facilitation," provides different types of questions to prompt deeper engagement with challenging topics. This resource guide provides additional ways to improve your facilitation practices.</p>
<p>Challenges</p>	<p>Doing anti-racist work "asks people to consider information and perspectives that challenge their self-concepts and worldviews" (Goodman, 2015). Discussions regarding implicit bias, race, and privilege can become emotional and draw resistance from white</p>

students. Resistance “is rooted in fear and anxiety,” and white students tend to become defensive when they feel threatened. Facilitators should not prioritize “being nice” or making white students “comfortable”; however, there are strategies that facilitators can use in an anticipatory manner to promote an engaging and productive activity. The following readings offer insight into addressing pushback from students when discussing topics such as race and racism.

Recommended readings:

Arao, B., & Clemens, K. (2013). From Safe Places to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice. In *The Art of Effective Facilitation* (1st ed., pp. 135–150). Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing. Retrieved from <https://www.anselm.edu/FromSafeSpacestoBraveSpaces.pdf>

Beckwith, B. (2014). In the Face of Resistance – a Lay Facilitator’s Experience. *Understanding and Dismantling Privilege, Special Issue: Resistance to Teaching Antiracism*. Retrieved from <https://www.wpcjournal.com/article/view/12324>

Goodman, D. (2015). Can You Love Them Enough to Help Them Learn?: Reflections of a Social Justice Educator on Addressing Resistance from White Students to Anti-Racism Education. *Understanding and Dismantling Privilege*. Retrieved from <https://www.wpcjournal.com/article/view/12208>

Integration into Instructional Practice

Instructor Self-Development:

- 1) Read through this resource guide and explore the recommended readings and videos.
- 2) Explore workshops and training offered by [Intergroup Relations](#), the [Center for Research on Learning and Teaching](#), and the [Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#).
- 3) Develop your skills as a facilitator
 - a) A great place to start is by taking this facilitator personal assessment: [Facilitator Personal Assessment - IGR](#). There is a detailed description of this assessment in the **Strategies** section of this guide.
 - b) Recommended texts:

Kaplowitz, D. R., Griffin, S. R., & Seyka, S. (2019). *Race dialogues: A facilitator's guide to tackling the elephant in the classroom*. ProQuest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu>

Landreman, L. M. (Ed.). (2013). *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*. ProQuest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu>

- 4) Self-reflexive journaling is a helpful way to process how race and racism show up in your personal life. Consider taking the time to journal using the following prompts:
 - a) Think about your experiences with race and racism:

- | | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">i) What/how did you first learn about race?ii) When did you first learn that you were a member of a racial group? What/how did you learn about your racial group?iii) Select a significant institution in our life (i.e., educational, religious, media/cultural, etc.). What have you learned from this institution about race? How might this have affected the relationships you have and how you identify racially (or not)? |
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b) Why is it important to hold a dialogue about race and racism in your classroom? Department?

c) What additional support do you need to facilitate a dialogue about race and racism in your classroom? Department?

Dialoguing about Race and Racism

Defining Race

What is race and how is it constructed?

When one ponders this question, one may instinctively think of skin color as the answer. While skin color is one of the most prominent features for an individual, it is not the defining feature to describe one's race. As Kaplowitz, Griffin, & Seyka (2019) note, there is not a single defining feature that is found only within one racial group. However, because people can fall back on physical, geographical, or cultural features to define one's race, inaccurate racial assumptions are common. Moving beyond defining race solely by skin color does not undermine the significance that skin color plays in societies and cultures around the world. Indeed, colorism, which values lighter-skinned people over darker-skinned people, is found throughout the world and, like racism, is rooted in White supremacy (Kaplowitz, Griffin, & Seyka, 2019).

A consequence of defining race based on physical, geographical, or cultural features, is that one can believe there are inherent biological differences between racial groups. In this belief, it is maintained that any disparities between races are biologically based. However, this is a belief rooted in White supremacy and pseudoscience. The historical context and roots of the enmeshment of race and biology are necessary to examine. In 1758, Carl Linnaeus, who founded modern taxonomy, defined six varieties of humans, each having particular behavior or personality traits. The Americanus was free and unyielding, the Europaeus was wise and light, the Asiaticus was stern and greedy, and the Africanus was sluggish and neglectful (Baker, 2021, p. 120). Later, Samuel Morton would use the pseudoscience of craniology and phrenology to claim that Whites were inherently more intelligent and thus superior to other racial groups. During his lifetime, Morton's beliefs of a natural hierarchy were used by others to justify racism and slavery. Upon his death in 1851, the *Charleston Medical Journal* stated: "We can only say that we of the South should consider him as our benefactor, for aiding most materially in giving to the negro his true position as an inferior race" (Renschler, 2008, p. 34).

Contesting such beliefs was the sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois. As Yuddell, Roberts, DeSalle, and Tishkoff (2016) state: "DuBois was the first to synthesize natural and social scientific research to conclude the concept of race was not a scientific category...Du Bois maintained that health disparities between blacks and whites stemmed from social, not biological inequality" (p. 564). A dire consequence of biologically constructing race was the eugenics movement that came to a flashpoint in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. As seen throughout history, race, when intertwined with biology, is used to build hierarchies, maintain White supremacy, and mask systemic and social inequities as the causes of disparities in health, wealth, and education.

Despite this history of racial pseudoscience, present-day genetics is making an effort to dispel any notion that race is a biological reality. As Baker (2021) notes:

Modern genetics shows that roughly 94% of human genetic variation is found *within* populations, whereas only 6% is *between* populations (or 'races'). Race, as it is now generally accepted by scientists, is not a biological reality but rather

reflects the cultural and social underpinnings originally used to justify slavery and that live on in a myriad of ways. (p. 121)

Yudell, Roberts, DeSalle, and Tishkoff (2016) claim that “...the use of biological concepts of race in human genetic research...is problematic at best and harmful at worst” (p. 566). Although race is not a biological fact, this does not prevent us from making conscious and unconscious judgments based on what we see. It also does not mean there are inherent racial disparities in health, wealth, and educational outcomes. As Yudell (2016) states: “Your race can impact your health, but your genetics is not a good window into how race affects your health.” Because these disparities do not correlate to one’s genetics, we must examine the systems and structures that drive differences between groups.

Race as a sociopolitical construction

Accepting that race cannot be described by skin color, biology, or geography, it is widely accepted that race is best defined as a socially and politically constructed category. As a sociopolitical construction, race has always maintained power and privilege for Whites while oppressing and limiting opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

A seminal moment in the history of racial stratification is Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676. Prior to the rebellion, efforts from the ruling elite to divide Black and White members of the lower socioeconomic class failed. Additionally, there was a growing coalition among aristocrats left out of elite circles, farmers, former indentured servants, indentured servants, and enslaved Blacks, as these disparate groups had differing reasons of discontentment, but a common enemy in the ruling elite (Tatum, 2017). Although Bacon’s Rebellion ultimately failed to overthrow the Virginia colonial government, it did have major ramifications. What troubled the ruling elite the most was not the act of rebellion, but who rebelled. Found within the rebellion was class solidarity between indentured servants and former indentured servants of both races as well as enslaved Africans (Tatum, 2017). In order to maintain their power and prevent similar rebellions, the ruling elite created value in Whiteness. As Tatum explains, the ruling elite offered Whites social advantages that were denied to Blacks and enacted laws to make Blacks slaves for life. Poor landless Whites could eventually obtain property and in turn gain the right to vote, while Blacks were, “relegated to the status of property” (Tatum, 2017, p. 657). The intent was to maintain power by preventing Whites of lower socioeconomic status from identifying and building coalitions with similarly positioned Blacks. In her book, “Fatal Invention,” Dr. Dorothy Roberts (2011) examines this period, noting that as officials began to separate, “white indenture from black enslavement and established ‘white,’ ‘Negro,’ and ‘Indian’ as distinct legal categories, race was literally manufactured by law” (p. 9). Tatum (2017) explains the present-day impact of these events:

Regardless of what class a White person comes from, he or she still enjoys some aspect of White privilege because there is one group—African Americans—who are lower on the social scale. Sharing White skin and franchise gave poor Whites and immigrants the illusion that they had more in common with their wealthy White oppressors than African Americans—though in reality they did not. (p. 659)

The aftermath of Bacon's Rebellion regarding maintaining power and White supremacy by stratifying race groups was not an isolated occurrence. Throughout history, there are examples of when Whiteness has been used to continue to drive wedges between Whites in lower socioeconomic levels who had more in common with similarly positioned Blacks than they did with wealthy Whites in positions of power. To demonstrate this strategy, Tatum highlights the examples of post-Reconstruction, Jim Crow, Richard Nixon's "law and order" campaign, Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign, and Donald Trump's presidency. A commonality in these moments is that they were preceded by, "periods when it appeared that White supremacy was waning" (Tatum, 2017, p. 660). Yet in each of these moments, counter-efforts were launched to maintain the status quo. As Tatum (2017) posits:

When it appears that a credible challenge is being mounted to the American system of racial stratification, retribalization/revitalization occurs among some elements of America's White population...racial redeemers have stepped to the forefront to snatch back control of the country so that their White identity can be affirmed. (p. 661)

As a sociopolitical construct, race is not inexorable, but it does produce real outcomes in privileging Whiteness while oppressing BIPOC communities. The historical context of the sociopolitical construction of race is critical in understanding its present-day impact. Racial stratification did not happen by accident, and we continue to see how race as a sociopolitical construction maintains White supremacy. However, accepting that race is not a biological reality can lead to color-blindness and aversion to talking about it. Because race is not a biological fact or rooted in science, people can make claims such as "I only see the human race," or "I don't see color." This color-blindness is problematic as it ignores the historical and present-day realities of marginalized groups in the U.S. As instructors if we disregard the identities our students hold, we fail to fully see our students, which can lead to obstructions in creating an inclusive and anti-racist space.

The next section offers examples of how you can mobilize this information for having productive and equity-informed race dialogue in your classroom.

Citations:

Baker, B., Race and Biology, *BioScience*, Volume 71, Issue 2, February 2021, Pages 119–126, <https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biaa157>

Kaplowitz, D. R., Griffin, S. R., & Seyka, S. (2019). *Race dialogues: A facilitator's guide to tackling the elephant in the classroom*. ProQuest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu>

Renschler, S. E., "The Samuel George Morton Cranial Collection" *Expedition Magazine* 50.3 (2008): pp. 30-38. *Expedition Magazine*. Penn Museum, 2008 <http://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/?p=8547>

Roberts, Dorothy. *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create Race in the Twenty-First Century*, New Press, The, 2011. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

	<p>https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/lib/umichigan/detail.action?docID=729441</p> <p>Tatum, D. C. (2017). Donald Trump and the Legacy of Bacon’s Rebellion. <i>Journal of Black Studies</i>, 48(7), 651–674. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934717713758</p> <p>Yudell, M., Roberts, D., DeSalle, R., Tishkoff., S. (February 2016). Taking race out of human genetics. <i>Science</i>, 351(6273), 564-565.</p>
<p>Why Dialogue About Race and Racism in Your Classroom?</p>	<p>The classroom spaces we occupy do not exist in vacuums nor are they neutral spaces. Everyone who enters the classroom space brings their identities, histories, privileges, struggles, beliefs, and values. This is the reality across departments and disciplines, and it is no less necessary to dialogue about race in a statistics course than in a language course. Students on a college campus do not live in a bubble, as media reports and incidents on college campuses, including the University of Michigan, regarding racism, become more publicized and talked about on a local and national level. Regardless of the media we consume and social circles we keep, Dr. Beverly Tatum (2017) argues that we are not living in a post-racial color-blind society, but a color-silent society, where we avoid talking about racial differences. As Tatum (2017) notes: “But even if we refrain from mentioning race, the evidence is clear: we still notice racial categories, and our behaviors are guided by what we notice” (p. 51). Thus, avoiding dialogue about race promotes an environment where our implicit bias will continue to inform our perspectives. Maintaining the status quo of refraining from dialoguing about race and racism is the antithesis of anti-racist pedagogy.</p> <p>Practicing anti-racist pedagogy requires instructors to critically examine race and racism in a variety of contexts. One of the key principles of anti-racist pedagogy is acknowledging racism in disciplinary, institutional, departmental contexts (add in anchor to this section). However, the motive behind dialoguing about race and racism is not to spark debate, but to be able to acknowledge how it shows up in the classroom (curriculum design, student participation/engagement, course content, instructor/student interactions, etc.) and outside of the classroom (institutional culture/values/policies, on campus, etc.).</p> <p>Citations:</p> <p>Tatum, Beverly Daniel. (2017, Summer/Fall). “Why Are All the Black Kids <i>Still</i> Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” and Other Conversations About Race in the 21st Century. <i>Liberal Education</i>, Summer/Fall 2017, 46-55.</p>
<p>How to Dialogue About Race and Racism in Your Classroom</p>	<p>Throughout this resource guide, there is an emphasis on dialogue and not debate. Holding a dialogue about race and racism can quickly turn into a debate if students are not first guided in understanding the difference between dialogue and debate. The Program on Intergroup Relations at the University of Michigan provides a helpful guide to highlight the differences between dialogue, debate, and discussion. Kaplowitz, Griffin, & Seyka (2019) note that the goal in dialogue is to: “Grow together/add to the common pool of knowledge,” while the goal of debate is to: “Win an argument/prove the other person is wrong.” As the facilitator of the dialogue, we must be able to identify when</p>

	<p>dialogue is turning into a debate. Specific facilitation strategies and skills are included in this resource guide.</p> <p>Because engaging in dialogue about race and racism can entail resistance, trauma, students shutting down, shame, and the reinforcement of dominant narratives, we must take extra care to prepare ourselves and our classrooms beforehand. Furthermore, we will inevitably make mistakes when dialoguing about race and racism. This reality exists for those beginning this work and for seasoned practitioners. Although mistakes will happen, this is not an excuse to avoid discussing race altogether. Indeed, missteps are part of the process as identifying and working through them helps us grow. Additionally, modeling how to handle a mistake in real-time can be a valuable learning moment for students. However, acknowledging these realities does not preclude us from putting in the time and effort to build our skills and capacity for dialoguing about race in the classroom. The following sections provide helpful concepts, strategies, and resources for holding a dialogue about race and racism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working assumptions/shared understandings for holding a dialogue about race and racism in the classroom • Potential challenges and resistance to dialoguing about race and racism in the classroom • Strategies to use when faced with challenges and resistance
<p>Working Assumptions/ Shared Understandings for Dialoguing About Race and Racism in the Classroom</p>	<p>Establishing working assumptions/shared understandings before engaging in a dialogue about race can ensure that everyone in the classroom has a similar foundation. Grounding dialogue in these assumptions/understandings helps set the tone and communicates how the class will work together. Although establishing working assumptions/shared understandings is a good practice, not every student may agree with them. If there is resistance to certain assumptions/understandings, this is an opportunity for open dialogue. Rather than silencing or shaming this resistance, validating and depersonalizing it can foster continued openness and sharing. In our “Strategies” section, we will provide tools and actions for such a situation. While there is no one standard set of assumptions/understandings, the following examples can guide you in crafting your own.</p> <p>Dr. Beverly Tatum (1992) outlines five working assumptions used in her classroom when talking and learning about racism. Tatum notes that these assumptions create a climate of safety as they are “non-blaming assumptions.” Tatum’s assumptions are abbreviated below. For the complete text, read Tatum (1992) listed in the citations section.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Racism, defined as a “system of advantage based on race”, is a pervasive aspect of U.S. socialization. It is virtually impossible to live in U.S contemporary society and not be exposed to some aspect of the personal, cultural, and/or institutional manifestations of racism in our society. (p. 3) 2) Prejudice, defined as a “preconceived judgment or opinion, often based on limited information,” is clearly distinguished from racism. Even when these preconceived ideas have positive associations (such as “Asian students are good in math”), they

have negative effects because they deny a person's individuality. (p. 3)

- 3) In the context of U.S. society, the system of advantage clearly operates to benefit Whites as a group. However, it is assumed that racism, like other forms of oppression, hurts members of the privileged group as well as those targeted by racism. While the impact of racism on Whites is clearly different from its impact on people of color, racism has negative ramifications for everyone. (p. 3)
- 4) Because of the prejudice and racism inherent in our environment when we were children, I assume that we cannot be blamed for learning what we were taught (intentionally or unintentionally). Yet as adults, we have a responsibility to try to identify and interrupt the cycle of oppression. (p. 4)
- 5) It is assumed that change, both individual and institutional, is possible. Understanding and unlearning prejudice and racism is a lifelong process that may have begun prior to enrolling in this class, and which will surely continue after the course is over. (p. 4)

Dr. Whitney Peoples (2021), when teaching about anti-racist pedagogy, offers participants an invitation to the following shared understandings:

1. Racism is a historical and contemporary reality
2. Racism is interpersonal and structural
3. There is no neutral stance toward racism
4. Our classes do not operate in a vacuum, they are shaped by both historical and contemporary manifestations of racism

Having working assumptions/shared understandings creates a solid foundation to build on when dialoguing about race. Referring to them throughout the class and semester can help keep dialogue flowing and students anchored to a core set of concepts. Despite the benefits of working assumptions/shared understandings, there will still be challenges in dialoguing about race and racism. The following section outlines potential challenges and resistance you may encounter in the classroom.

Citations:

Peoples, W. (2021, February 18). *Principles and Practices of Anti-Racist Pedagogy* [Webinar]. CRLT.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. (1992). Talking about Race, Learning about racism: An application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(1), 1-24. Access reading by using this link: <https://www.beverlydanieltatum.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Tatum-Talking-About-Race.pdf>

Potential Challenges and Resistance to

Having a dialogue about race in the classroom space can involve challenges, resistance, and conflict. Even with established assumptions/shared understandings as a foundation, not everyone in the classroom has gone through the same [cycle of socialization](#). Our

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socialization informs our beliefs, values, perspectives, and attitudes. For some students, they have never critically examined their socialization. As a result, many of their deeply held beliefs will be challenged as they dialogue with other students with different lived experiences. When these beliefs are challenged, a common response is resistance through disengaging or shutting down from the dialogue. What we do as instructors and facilitators in these moments can make the difference between a learning opportunity and students shutting down completely.

However, before moving forward, we want to delineate the difference between conflict and resistance. Whereas conflict can be transformational, resistance leads to the entrenchment of beliefs and values. Kaplowitz, Griffin, & Seyka (2019) state: "At its core, dialogue is about facilitating participants engagement around conflicting beliefs. Resistance, on the other hand, is an unwillingness to engage in the challenge of dialogue" (p. 82). Thus, the goal of holding a dialogue about race and racism is to engage in generative conflict, helping students reach a *learning edge*. As described by Kaplowitz et al. (2019), a learning edge is "a space where we challenge ourselves to get out of our comfort zones" (p. 30). Guiding students to a learning edge is necessary for dialogue, as this is where growth can occur, but keeping students in this space can be challenging. The following are possible challenges and forms of resistance that can arise when dialoguing about race and racism.

Just as instructors need to examine their positionality in the classroom, students must critically reflect on their social positions and identities. In a predominantly White classroom, BIPOC students may feel additional pressure if they are treated as representatives for their racial group or looked to educate White peers on racism. However, these scenarios can play out in classrooms where White students are not the majority in terms of class enrollment. We cannot assume that all students will feel comfortable participating in a dialogue on race and racism. Both instructors and students may believe that the cause of students who participate less frequently is due to personal and not classroom dynamics. In addition to race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and other identities can impact the classroom climate and participation. Although this resource guide focuses on race and racism, having an intersectional lens in the classroom is critical when facilitating dialogue.

Through their own classroom experience, Ochoa and Pineda (2008) asked themselves the following question when teaching the course "Chicanos/Latinas and Education,": "How can we create a space that does not reproduce hierarchies and dominant ideologies and in which the perspectives and ways of participating are not Eurocentric, classist, or masculinist?" (p. 50) Despite being on a predominantly White campus, the class was a majority Latinx students with a small number of White students. However, as the class progressed, it became clear that the White students in the class were speaking more frequently and for longer periods of time compared to the Latinx students. Ochoa and Pineda (2008) note: "They (White students) openly shared their perspectives and contrasted their educational experiences with the ones offered in the course materials...without interrogating their own privileges and the systems of inequality that perpetuated differences in school and family resources" (p. 49).

When Latinx students did participate in the form of sharing personal experiences related

to class content, most of the White students expressed wanting to focus on the course readings as opposed to discussing students' experiences. One self-identified White student wrote in a free write: "I want to avoid just telling stories, and I want to learn about the subjects we are discussing" (Ochoa and Pineda, 2008, p. 52). As Ochoa and Pineda observed, although Latinx students became subjects by connecting their lived experiences to the course materials, White students did not see their stories as relevant or important to the subject matter. For these students, the theories and relevant course content came from the course authors, not their classmates. Ochoa and Pineda (2008) summarize a key takeaway and reminder for instructors: "This class reminded us that to the extent that courses value textbook knowledge over students' perspectives and experiences, we risk silencing students, marginalizing multiple histories, hindering the development of new ideas, and stifling critical students' critical thinking skills" (pgs. 52-53). Classroom spaces must consider the different identities students bring into the room, the power dynamics present, and how these play out regarding classroom climate and participation. Next, we will examine additional potential forms of resistance and challenges when dialoguing about race and racism.

Based on her experience teaching the course, "Psychology of Racism," Dr. Beverly Tatum (1992) identifies sources of resistance found in predominantly White college classrooms. Although some students may voluntarily enroll in a course that covers topics of race and racism, being aware of the potential sources of resistance will help instructors better prepare to address them in the classroom.

Tatum's sources of student resistance:

- 1) Race is considered a taboo topic for discussion, especially in racially mixed settings. (p. 5)
 - a. Tatum notes that this is "an essential obstacle to overcome" in order to have a dialogue about race and racism in the classroom. Because of how students can be socialized around race, they learn not to talk about it and instead develop "confusion, anxiety, and/or fear" around the topic.
- 2) Students, regardless of racial-group membership, have been socialized to think of the United States as a just society. (p. 5)
 - a. It is common for students to see racism on the personally mediated/interpersonal level, believing that it is distilled down to individual acts and actors. Not seeing racism on the systemic level may lead some students to believe that while racism on the interpersonal level is a problem, everyone still has an equal opportunity to succeed based on their effort. As a result, Tatum notes that students, particularly White students, may experience cognitive dissonance when they are presented with quantitative and qualitative data regarding systemic racism.
- 3) Students, particularly White students, initially deny any personal prejudice, recognizing the impact of racism on other people's lives, but failing to acknowledge its impact on their own. (p. 5)
 - a. As students learn about race and racism, they begin to see how they are made manifest in the U.S. Tatum notes: "Beliefs, attitudes, and actions

based on racial stereotypes begin to be remembered and are newly observed by White students” (p. 8). Regarding students of color, Tatum observes that some may “recognize negative attitudes they may have internalized about their own racial group or that they have believed about others” (p. 8). However, this new self-awareness by both groups can change the classroom dynamic, as White students may withdraw from the dialogue while students of color may increase their participation.

In addition to Tatum’s work, Harbin, Thurber, and Bandy (2019) identify five challenges associated with teaching race:

- 1) Students may articulate simplistic models of racial identity (p. 5)
 - a. This resource guide started with a brief overview of how race is constructed in U.S. society, noting that race is not a biological reality, but a social construct. Students entering a dialogue about race and racism may hold simplistic ideas and understandings on why dialogue is needed. Similar to what Tatum notes, Harbin et al. (2019) explain that students may only “subscribe to the individualist interpretations of racism that focus on individuals’ manifestations of racial prejudice or discrimination rather than the complex institutional, cultural, and macro-social processes that can create racial inequality and injustice...” (p. 5)
- 2) White students may resist confronting issues of race and racism (p. 6)
 - a. Harbin et al., note four ways White students may resist going to their learning edge when their worldviews and perspectives are challenged:
 - i. Cast themselves as innocent bystanders of racism
 - ii. Adopt myths of meritocracy, believing that success equates to effort
 - iii. Only seeing racism as an overt manifestation by individuals
 - iv. Claim racism is a regional problem (e.g., Southerners are racists)
- 3) Internalized oppression may complicate participation for students of color (p. 6)
 - a. Internalized oppression can remain hidden as students may not be aware of how it has impacted their lives. Additionally, students who have internalized oppression may have difficulty engaging in a dialogue about race and racism. Harbin, Thurber, and Bandy note, “...for students of color, addressing issues of race may be complicated by incongruence between how others perceive them based on their race, and their own self-concept based on ethnic, religious, or cultural identification.” (p. 6)
- 4) Instructors may feel uncertain about whether to, or how best to intervene when students have emotional responses to course content (p. 7)
 - a. Dialoguing about race and racism can lead to a variety of emotional responses from students, including trauma, resentment, guilt, anger, and pride. Because emotions can run high, students may react in a variety of ways, from shutting down to doubling down on dominant racial ideologies. These moments can create tension and uncertainty, leaving an instructor unsure of how to respond.

5) Instructors may face challenges in their authority (p. 7)

- a. One way that students resist when their beliefs are challenged is to question the instructor's ability and authority to facilitate a dialogue about race and racism. For faculty of color, students may regard them as "less competent and expertly informed" while white faculty may be viewed "skeptically or with distrust among students of color" (Harbin et al., p. 8). Because of these two possibilities, instructors must examine their positionality in the classroom. Self-reflexivity is a key practice in anti-racist pedagogy and can help instructors understand how they may be perceived by students when leading a dialogue on race and racism.

The last set of potential forms of resistance is made manifest through White fragility. This section is particularly important for instructors at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) or who are in predominantly White classrooms. As defined by Robin DiAngelo (2011):

White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. (p. 54)

White fragility exists because many dominant narratives, institutions, cultural representations, media, spaces, school textbooks and curriculum are centered on Whiteness. Because Whiteness is normalized in the U.S., White people can be oblivious to the oppression marginalized groups face as a result of their privileged social positions. Thus, when confronted with information that calls out privilege, Whiteness, White supremacy, and dominant narratives, White people can fail to respond in constructive ways.

Kaplowitz et al. (2019) outline four examples of manifestations of White fragility and how facilitators can respond in the moment.

- 1) **"Colorblind" master narrative: "I don't see color, we all bleed red."** Hesitancy to engage in a dialogue about race and racism can be expressed by a student making this claim. Additionally, as McNair, Bensimon, and Malcom-Piqueux (2020) note, because race is not a biological reality, some may argue that we should not make judgments on it. McNair et al. (2020) call on instructors to avoid this sentiment, as they state that some instructors may feel "it is not their prerogative to assign identities to students" (p. 33). Claiming that one is colorblind perpetuates harm against the BIPOC community, as one erases another's lived experience. Kaplowitz et al. suggest that when this narrative is expressed, facilitators must remind participants that seeing race is not racist, but a necessary component to the dialogue.
- 2) **Blame the victim narrative: "It's their fault if they can't get a job. I worked for everything I have."** This dominant narrative ignores the institutional racism that pervades institutions such as the job market, healthcare, housing, and education. Similar to the merit-based beliefs found in the preceding examples of resistance,

this narrative is typically built upon unexamined privilege. For additional insight into the topic of privilege, review our resource guide, "[An Instructor's Guide to Understanding Privilege](#)." Instructors can respond to this narrative by presenting data related to each of these institutions, highlighting the disparities between White and BIPOC populations.

- 3) Racism is not my fault:** *"Don't blame me, my family came to the United States after slavery ended."* White supremacy is systemically entrenched in the United States. Thus, while a White person may not associate themselves with the system of White supremacy, this does not prevent them from benefiting from it in the United States. This narrative is associated with unexamined privilege, as those who believe it fail to see that their Whiteness grants them unearned privileges not afforded to BIPOC populations. Kaplowitz et al. (2019) note that instructors can respond to this narrative by reminding students that:

White people still have unearned advantages that they can and should work to dismantle. These advantages are not reserved for the descendants of slave owners, just as experiences of racism and discrimination are not reserved only for those people who had enslaved ancestors. (p. 86)

- 4) Reverse Racism:** *"Nowadays, White people are the ones being discriminated against."* As defined in the LSA Anti-Racism Task Force report, racism is, "The fusion of institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice against Black people, Indigenous people and People of color..." (LSA Anti-Racism Task Force report, p. 7) A key concept in this definition is the idea that racism is a combination of prejudice and power. Tatum (1992) notes that while BIPOC groups can be prejudiced against White people and other groups, "it is only the attitudes of Whites that routinely carry with them the social power inherent in the systemic cultural reinforcement and institutionalization of those racial prejudices" (p. 3). Facilitators can respond to this narrative in a similar way to the second narrative by showing the disparities between White people and BIPOC populations in the various institutions in the United States.

Anticipating challenges and different manifestations of student resistance can help instructors better prepare for facilitating a dialogue on race and racism. Although this resource guide presents some examples of possible challenges and resistance, there may be other forms you encounter in the classroom. While this is not a definitive list, it highlights some of the more common examples of resistance and challenges in this work. As instructors and facilitators of this dialogue, being what Kaplowitz et al. (2019) call a "global listener" is crucial. As a global listener, you need to be aware of individual verbal and non-verbal cues, as well as the overall climate in the classroom. The following section provides strategies to address challenges and resistance to dialoguing about race and racism.

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Strategies to Address Challenges and Resistance to Dialoguing About Race and Racism

Thus far, this resource guide has covered the construction of race in the United States, the reasoning behind dialoguing about race and racism in the classroom, establishing working assumptions/shared understandings, and potential challenges and resistance in this work. The last section focuses on strategies and actions instructors can implement to address the challenges and resistance that they may encounter in the classroom. These strategies and actions correspond to the challenges and resistance section, as they come from the same authors and practitioners.

Develop Classroom Community and Relationships

Building community is an essential practice in any classroom but is critically important when engaging in a dialogue about race and racism. Many of the strategies and tools outlined in this resource guide can help foster a sense of community and belonging in the classroom. Establishing this environment can ensure that students feel connected to each other, heard and that their values and beliefs are acknowledged. As Kaplowitz, Griffin, & Seyka (2019) note, "Spending time getting to know one another will allow dialogue members to view each other as whole people with dignity, as opposed to single-identity or single-issue people." (p. 34)

One common yet effective way to develop a sense of belonging is to use icebreakers. Our resource guide, "[Icebreaker Grab Bag](#)," offers a variety of community-building activities. In addition to these activities, our "[Core Values](#)" and "[Mapping Social Identity Timeline](#)" activities allow students to get to know each other's values and socialization through an aspect of identity.

Freewrites, Journaling, and Reflection

Ochoa and Pineda (2008) addressed the challenges they witnessed in their classroom regarding participation and dominant ideologies by openly addressing classroom dynamics. Through structured freewrites based on what was being observed in class, students felt like they had greater agency. One student reflected on these opportunities:

I have never been asked to share my feelings about this matter in other classrooms, and how that I have, it makes me feel important. If all the professors here would do the same and make a sincere effort to provide a comfortable atmosphere in which ALL students can participate, I think I would've gained so much more in my last three years. (Ochoa and Pineda, 2008, p. 57)

Ochoa and Pineda (2008) highlight that this strategy also provided an opportunity for instructors to gain greater insight into "...students' differing expectations for the course, their reflections on modes of communication, and the roles socialization and previous experiences played in classroom participation" (p. 51). As a result of the freewrite and reflection process, students began to better understand how not all students were experiencing the class the same way. They also examined how their behaviors were having an impact on the classroom dynamics. The complete list of questions Ochoa and Pineda developed for students to reflect on is found on p. 50 of *Deconstructing Power, Privilege, and Silence in the Classroom*.

Another way to foster reflexivity is to provide assignments where students can make connections between course content/dialogue and their lived experiences through autobiographical journaling. Harbin, Thurber, and Bandy (2019) offer the following prompts:

- What/how did you first learn about race?
- When did you first learn that you were a member of a racial group? What/how did you learn about your racial group?
- When did you first learn that there were racial groups other than your own? What/how did you learn about these groups?
- How do you perceive your own race, and how do others perceive your race?
- Select a significant institution in your life (i.e., educational, religious, media/cultural, etc.). What have you learned from this institution about race? How might this have affected the relationships you have and how you identify racially (or not)?
- Scan your relationships with people who have been socialized into a different racial group than yourself. Thinking back to your childhood, what has been the nature of these relationships (i.e., friends, family, teachers, service providers, mentors/coaches, charity recipients, etc.)? Have the types of relationships changed over time? What do you notice about the relationships in your life today? (p. 15)

Outside of reflection, journaling can also be a productive way for students to respond to a "[hot moment](#)" in class. Kaplowitz, Griffin, & Seyka (2019) offer the following prompts: "What I don't want to say out loud right now...What I really want to say out loud right

now...This is how we can get past this hot moment” (p. 101). Student responses can be anonymous, turned in, or kept by students. One benefit of students turning in their responses is that they can help you better understand where students are at and aid in planning future class sessions from their responses.

Use Dialogic Techniques

The University of Michigan [Program on Intergroup Relations](#) (IGR) promotes students’ learning about social group identity, social inequality, and intergroup relations. A structured process that IGR uses in its work is *intergroup dialogue*. As defined by IGR, “Intergroup dialogue uses dialogic principles to focus conversations on how people with differential access to social power, privilege and cherished resources, and thus view the world, and potential action for social change/justice differently. It encourages collaborative action for change.” This resource guide emphasizes dialoguing about race and racism and not debating or discussing race and racism. You can find the resource guide, “[Applying Dialogic Techniques](#),” on the LSA Inclusive Teaching website, which provides an overview and reflection prompts for different dialogic techniques relating to intergroup dialogue. While reviewing all 11-pages is highly recommended, this guide will focus on:

- Developing Community Guidelines/Norms
- PASK
- Interrupting Bias: PALS
- How to Apologize: Re-Aact

Developing Community Guidelines/Norms

Creating a space for students to build community and their learning environment can increase participation and investment in the class. Furthermore, when students actively participate in crafting classroom guidelines, they are more likely to follow them. The process of creating classroom guidelines can and should happen throughout the course, especially as students self-reflect on the class, their engagement, and participation. Implementing new strategies and guidelines, as defined by students, can foster continued growth and development as this combines reflection with action. When Ochoa and Pineda (2008) involved students in this process, they noted: “...we found that students were more aware of their participation and made an earnest effort to abide by the new rules. They felt invested in making the classroom work, and they had a stake in changing their behaviors and beliefs.” (p. 57)

Although it is recommended that students are involved in developing guidelines, the following are guidelines that IGR has found most helpful. For additional examples of inclusive guidelines, review our resource guide, “[Discussion Guidelines](#).”

IGR Insight – [Developing Community Guidelines](#):

- 1) Be present and engaged
- 2) Share airtime
- 3) Be aware of intent and impact
- 4) Don’t suppress voices

- 5) Expect and accept discomfort (and joy)
- 6) Speak our emotions, as well as our intellect
- 7) Speak from your own experience
- 8) Listen to learn, not to respond
- 9) Do not freeze people in time
- 10) Anticipate unfinished business
- 11) Take the learning, leave the stories

PASK (Passion, Personal Awareness, Skills, Knowledge)

While we cannot control how students will react, respond, or engage in a dialogue about race and racism, we can control how prepared we are as facilitators. As dialogue facilitators, we must continually reflect on our social positions, bias, and relation to power, privilege, and oppression. Asking students to reflect on race and racism without doing our personal work of critical self-reflection can hinder our ability to facilitate dialogue. Just as we are content experts in our discipline, it is our responsibility to develop anti-racist pedagogical practices. The LSA Inclusive Teaching website offers the resource guides "[An Instructor's Guide to Understanding Privilege](#)," "[Doing One's Own Personal Work on Privilege and Oppression](#)," and "[Implicit Bias](#)" to practice self-reflection on these topics.

An additional resource is the [PASK Facilitator Personal Assessment Chart](#). This IGR Insights guide allows facilitators to measure their competency regarding the social justice framework they bring to intergroup dialogue. Completing this assessment can help guide instructors in their ongoing learning as they reflect on their passion, personal awareness, skills, and knowledge.

Interrupting Bias: PALS

Facilitators cannot anticipate what a student will say in classroom dialogue. However, as outlined in the challenges and resistance section, facilitators should anticipate that something could be said that is problematic or hurtful to others or yourself. PALS, which stands for: Pause, Acknowledge/Ask, Listen, and Speak your truth/share stories, is a tool for both facilitators and students to use in intergroup dialogue. As described by Kaplowitz, Griffin, & Seyka (2019), "The major objective of this approach is to stay connected with the offending person and to speak our truth clearly. It is designed to be useful precisely in those moments when we are triggered, and our rational response evades us." (p. 98) For a more detailed overview of PALS, review the IGR Insight document that is hyperlinked below. Kaplowitz, Griffin, & Seyka (2019) provide an in-depth overview of PALS in chapter 9 of their book.

IGR Insight – [Interrupting Bias: PALS](#):

P – Pause: Pause/Halt/Slow the Conversation

Things you can say:

- "Wait a second,"
- "Excuse me,"

- “Um, hold on a second...”
- “Can we pause for just a minute?”
- “I want to return to something that was just said...”

A – Acknowledge/Ask: Acknowledge what the person is saying, ask for clarification, let them know what you think you heard them say

Things you can say:

- “What I hear you saying is...”
- “I appreciate your thinking on this...”
- “That sounds important, can you say more?”
- “I think you said that gender defines who makes a good leader.”

L – Listen: Listen to what the person said

Treat them with dignity. What really matters to the person? Practicing generous listening is essential, as it conveys genuine curiosity, openness, and a suspension of your own inner voice.

S – Speak Your True/Share Stories: Speak your truth, share your learning, speak calmly

Be clear and describe your objection. While some students respond to data, others are moved to open up when they hear stories. Share your own story or a story about someone you know.

Things you can say:

- “I used to think that way too, but I have learned this is a stereotype and a person can be a good leader regardless of gender.”

How to Apologize: Re-Aact

Because we are continuously learning and developing as instructors and facilitators, we will inevitably make mistakes when talking about race and racism. We will also see students make mistakes as they learn and develop. Mistakes can foster our growth if we can acknowledge them and own them when they happen. When we do make a mistake, knowing how to apologize will help us avoid ignoring it or doubling down by defending the mistake. One of the best parts about Re-Aact is that it is simple to remember and execute (with practice) when you are feeling fight, flee, or freeze in the moment. As the facilitator of the dialogue, modeling how to apologize is extremely beneficial to students, as you are providing them with a tool to use in and outside of the classroom. Kaplowitz, Griffin, & Seyka (2019) note: “When the person who makes a mistake is not defensive and does not give excuses, it has a healing effect on everyone. It takes courage and practice *not* to get defensive and to hold oneself accountable in the heat of the moment” (p. 92, emphasis in original).

IGR Insight – [How to Apologize: Re-Aact:](#)

Re – Reflect: Reflect on the situation and listen to people if they indicate you have hurt someone or a group of people.

	<p>A – Acknowledge: Acknowledge and accept responsibility for your actions.</p> <p>A – Apologize: Say you are sorry. It doesn't really matter what you intended. If you have made a mistake or violated someone else's dignity, you simply need to address the impact of your actions on the other person.</p> <p>C – Change your behavior: Share exactly what you will do in the future to avoid such a mistake. Recognize that your apology is just the beginning.</p> <p>T – Thank: Thank the person/group for sharing the new information.</p>
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