

Engaging Teaching Dilemmas to Foster Culturally Responsive and Antiracist Teaching Practice

*Race and Pedagogy Journal:
Teaching and Learning for
Justice*



ENGAGING TEACHING DILEMMAS TO FOSTER CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND ANTIRACIST TEACHING PRACTICE

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“Antiracist educators must constantly negotiate between two antiracist impulses in deciding their everyday behaviors toward students: they must choose between the antiracist impulse to treat all people as human beings rather than racial group members, and the antiracist impulse to recognize people’s real experiences as racial group members in order to assist them, understand their situation better, and treat them equitably.”

Pollock, M. (2006). Everyday Antiracism in Education. American Anthropological Association. <http://www.understandingrace.org/resources/pdf/rethinking/pollock.pdf>

The Masters of Arts in Teaching program at the University of Puget Sound prepares teachers who interrogate their own biases and social location—to actively pursue culturally responsive practice and to contribute collaboratively to the ongoing work of equity

The School of Education and the department of African American Studies work in partnership to develop intentional and mutually beneficial opportunities for programmatic and curricular collaboration. Our collective work is focused on unearthing, processing, and sitting with racist and historical legacies; imagining generative cross program collaborations; supporting the ongoing work of the Race and Pedagogy Institute; and grounding teacher and counselor education in the specific context of Tacoma’s urban education environment. The Race and Pedagogy Institute educates students and teachers at all levels to think critically about race, to cultivate terms and practices for societal transformation, and to act to eliminate racism. School of Education students, staff, and faculty support the institute by planning conference sessions focused on K-12 teachers and students, presenting at and attending conference sessions, supporting undergraduate students to present their work, and serving as guest editors for the Race and Pedagogy Journal.

This special Issue of the Race and Pedagogy Journal features artist statements and images of projects created by Master of Arts in Teaching candidates in their master’s coursework focused on developing anti-racist and culturally responsive teaching practices.

EDUC 628: Centering Race and Unlearning Racism

The central work of this course is to center race as a lens for understanding education and miseducation in American schooling. Students will engage the ongoing process of confronting and unlearning socialized assumptions about race and how these manifest in classrooms and in their own racialized identities. Students will reflect on classroom teaching and learning experiences to develop and apply strategies and action steps that promote racial equity in learning contexts. We will engage the following questions:

- How do I define my racialized identity?
- What does it mean to name and unlearn socialized assumptions, beliefs, and practices about race?
- How does individual, interpersonal, and systemic racism manifest in classrooms and schools?

EDUC 629: Engaging Teaching Dilemmas to Foster Culturally Responsive Practice

This masters project seminar uses reflective analysis to reconsider pedagogical dilemmas emerging from student teaching.

In professional collaboration, students will explore questions relating to culturally responsive teaching:

- What does it mean to be a culturally responsive and antiracist practitioner?
- How do my experiences and intersectional identities impact my cultural responsiveness?
- What actions can I take to interrogate my biases and social location and to contribute collaboratively to the ongoing work of equity?

As a result of their exploration, students will develop projects and consider implications and action steps for future practice.



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COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO MAT CANDIDATE PROJECTS

Several colleagues and community members have engaged with MAT candidate projects in different venues – at an end of year Poster Session where candidates share their work, at the Race & Pedagogy Community Partners Forum, at the Tacoma Public Schools Equity Summit, and at an annual meeting of the Washington Association of Colleges of Teacher Education. We have invited a few of our community partners and teacher education colleagues to contribute their voice to the journal in response to their engagement with MAT candidates' projects. We provided three reflection prompts: What do you notice in the students' work? Why is it important for teachers to engage the topic of racism? and/or What would you expect teacher educator programs to teach candidates?

Tariq Akmal, Ph.D., Chair, Department of Teaching and Learning, College of Education, Washington State University and President, Washington Association of Colleges of Teacher Education

Artistic expressions of learning immediately step us out of the dominant approach to expression of deep, analytic thinking, which is usually a written, text-based narrative. The arts-based approach used by the teacher education program at the University of Puget Sound gives teacher candidates more freedom to express themselves, to take risks, and to try out new understandings of how they are beginning to understand systemic structures of race and racism as well as the tools to begin to interrogate their own actions and experiences as well as those of their K-12 students. This is evident in the work of the Masters of Arts in Teaching candidates' efforts to understand culturally responsive teaching and the individual, personal, and structural racism that is evident in everyday life, including classrooms. The teacher candidates' projects offers us an insight to how the program is attempting to interrogate its own level of cultural responsiveness while helping teacher candidates grapple with their own actions, stances, and examination of their contributions to the personalized and structural racism of the educational system. Each teacher candidate examined their own actions and its effects on students of color as well as white students—and in all cases, realized that they needed to rethink their own actions and consider a much deeper, personal, and more inclusive approach to working with students who are not just like them.

This project is an excellent example of how teacher education programs and candidates can engage with the inequitable paradigms and practices of schooling and begin to formulate an approach that will be more likely to benefit all students who have been marginalized, especially students of color, while also helping students of privilege begin to examine and recognize their own status and practices that continue to create unequal schooling. The opportunity to examine one's own actions and then to rethink and try a different, more inclusive approach—as illustrated by projects such as the three act play, the mobile, and the conflict repair circle, to name a few—begins to help the University of Puget Sound and teacher candidates unmask the hidden assumptions behind how teaching and teacher education have continued to reproduce a model of teaching that clearly does not benefit all students.



Kimi Ginn, Director Vibrant Schools Tacoma and Race & Pedagogy Community Partners Forum Member

Vibrant Schools Tacoma (VST) is a coalition of community-based organizations who share both a common vision and commitment to executing a myriad of strategies and activities for the purpose of advocating for the marginalized students and their respective families and communities who receive educational services from Tacoma Public Schools. VST recognizes the importance and impact to ensuring that those voices not being heard and those voices much too often not respected, do have a voice. It is through the collaborate efforts of its membership that a clear message of advocacy for the disenfranchised is consistently voiced.

VST's mission is "to eliminate educational disparities for students of color and families of color and those impacted by poverty who are served by Tacoma Public Schools." The delivery of its mission is multifaceted ranging from monitoring all school board meetings to engaging in partnership activities that build the capacity of undoing institutional racism. All of its activities are focused on holding Tacoma Public Schools accountable for delivering public school services that function with a clear lens of equity, diversity, inclusion and respect. This includes policies, procedures, curriculum and pedagogy.

It is the area of pedagogy that Vibrant Schools Tacoma is so honored to have been chosen to participate in the Advancing Systemic Equity (ASE) Project with School of Education at the University of Puget Sound (UPS). VST commends the university for initiating such a comprehensive and authentic transformation of its Master of Arts in Teaching Program. The inclusion of a community partner such as VST to assist in both curriculum development and pedagogy reform clearly demonstrates the university vanguard posture in developing a master's degree program and process that will establish a new generation of urban education-based teachers who will be equipped with a unique undoing institutional racism style of teaching. The result, less chances of perpetuating a school delivery system that yields educational disparities for the students of color and those impacted by poverty.

Theresa Hickey, Assistant Professor of Education, St. Martin's University

These compelling works illustrate the transformative nature of critical reflection. They provide thought-provoking representations of what appear to be simple, fleeting interactions that took place in school settings. Further critical reflection on these moments, however, expose deep tangles of socialized assumptions about race, about learning, and about education. The honest engagements displayed in these projects depict the power that an action or comment has to uphold a system, but they also reveal the power that focused critical reflection can have to create change. For in projects such as this, reflection has the potential to be transformative for both the creator of the project and its audience. Projects framed and reflected upon in this authentic manner invite us to be partners in change. They engage us in the work of seeing, of questioning, of recognizing ourselves in these moments. They force us to think critically about race, bias, and racism. And they challenge us in our humility to listen, to critically reflect, and to engage with greater purpose in the ongoing work for equity and change.



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Justina Johnson, Director, AVID and Advanced Programs Equity, Tacoma Public Schools and Race & Pedagogy Community Partners Forum Member

I remember being blown away by the content of the MAT projects. One of the projects, [Seek to Understand](#), was shared and discussed at our Race & Pedagogy Community Partner forum table group. The MAT candidate had captured a few of the racist, inequitable, and disparaging comments about students he heard from educators at the school where he was assigned for student teaching. The essence of the comments was so distracting and shocking for him he did not have the words to respond at the time. Therefore, his project was a reckoning of his own lack of intervention as a white male in the education system among other white predominately females in an elementary school setting. He felt he did not fully advocate for the students, and therefore was complicit and accepting of the comments. He grappled with what could or should have been said as response to those comments and built his project around that very concern.

The student's project prompted me to ask, "How we can get this level of learning and unlearning in front of all our teachers currently working in the system?" This type of reflection and openness is necessary for all, especially in education spaces. The implicit and explicit bias that shows up in front of our students is real and impacts student well-being and achievement. By expecting the MAT students to look at education through a racial equity lens, disparities were uncovered and scrutinized at least on a personal level, and the impact was felt. The next important step of how to correct this was pursued which is oftentimes where situations fall short. I am so happy for the MAT Teacher Educator Program. There were several other thought-provoking projects, learnings, and discussions. As a result, the MAT professors and students engaged in our Tacoma Public Schools Equity Summit in June 2019 at which they presented Centering Race and Unlearning Racism to Develop Culturally Responsive and Anti-Racist Teaching Practices to a large group of educators. The session was the most well-received of the summit, and I would love to continue partnering with Puget Sound MAT department faculty for future opportunities for us to unlearn racism. What this program does for new teachers is phenomenal.

Pete Renn, Assistant Dean, Certification Programs, Director, Center for Professional Education, Seattle Pacific University

Teacher education students keenly recognize the need for being equipped and prepared to teach in culturally diverse classroom settings. Addressing aspects of privilege and oppression requires an openness to critically examine a person's sociocultural background and lens in which the world is viewed. Teacher education programs need to respond accordingly by providing relevant and effective methods for pre-service teachers to reflect and develop a better understanding of themselves and the world around them. The impactful projects I had the privilege to explore demonstrated these deep reflective practices. It is reassuring knowing these students have started the journey of serving as both an accomplice and advocate for marginalized populations and address the historic inequities long-embedded in our schooling system.

Patrick Sexton, Assistant Dean, College of Education, University of Washington

One hope I hold for our students at the University of Washington is that, by the end of their program, they realize just how much they have to learn. That is, I want them to understand that they leave us not as finished products, as master teachers, but rather they leave as learners on a lifelong journey of becoming the teachers they want to be. I saw evidence of that stance across the projects UPS graduate students created as part of their Engaging Teaching Dilemmas to Foster Culturally Responsive Practice course. Engaging with the projects I got a real sense that the novice teachers were grappling with their identities and how those related to the teachers they wanted to become.

"Becoming" is a really vulnerable place to be, particularly as it relates to anti-racist and culturally sustaining teaching. We want to be anti-racist, we want to be culturally responsive and sustaining teachers. But the truth is, I think, we can only get better at these. We can only be on the path, vigilant and vulnerable. Willing to make mistakes. Willing to say, "I need to do better." I saw that reflected in this student work.



RACE & PEDAGOGY INSTITUTE MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Race & Pedagogy Institute is to educate students and teachers at all levels to think critically about race, to cultivate terms and practices for societal transformation, and to act to eliminate racism.

Faculty Project Advisors

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