



Teaching and Learning for Social Justice and Equity in Higher Education

Content Areas

Edited by

C. Casey Ozaki · Laura Parson

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Staci Gilpin (she/her/hers) is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at the College of St. Scholastica and a doctoral student in Educational Foundations and Research at the University of North Dakota. She holds a master's degree in Special Education from the University of Wisconsin-Superior. Before moving into higher education, she worked in K-12 schools for two decades as a teacher, instructional coach, and administrator. Staci is an advocate for quality online instruction as an avenue to provide access to higher education for students who are from underrepresented groups, geographically limited, and for those that require more flexible learning environments. She has facilitated over thirty online courses and designed several more. Staci specializes in creating community in online courses, using collaboration online, and inclusive teaching practices. Her research focuses on online student engagement, the role of values, and fostering persistence.

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Simone Hyater-Adams (she/her) is a physicist, artist, educator, and researcher with a passion for creating more opportunities for Black STEM students. After receiving her B.S. in Physics from Hampton University, she pursued graduate studies at the ATLAS Institute at the University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) where she was a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow. In her graduate research, she used her personal experiences from pursuing physics to guide her interdisciplinary research examining the connections between performance art and identity for Black Physicists. This work was awarded the Harry Lustig Award from the American Physical Society's Four Corners Section. Currently, Simone is an Education and Diversity Programs Manager at American Physical Society working with their National Mentoring Community. In addition to this work, Simone also develops and facilitates equity workshops with goals to cultivate more inclusive and equitable STEM learning and working environments.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Laura Parson and C. Casey Ozaki

Since the first volume in this series, and, indeed, since the initial drafts for this volume, Volume II of four,¹ were written, the United States has changed. Not, perhaps, in the ways that some may think—racism has not gotten worse per se, although there has certainly been a resurgence of overt and violent racist acts since the election of Donald J. Trump to the presidency in 2016—what has changed is white America’s realization and awareness of racism. We say this not to diminish the unique brutality of the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, but to emphasize how their killings are modern evidence of centuries of police brutality against

¹Since the publication of Volume I, we have added a fourth volume to the series. This volume will focus on education in virtual and online settings in response to the need for a larger discussion about teaching for social justice and equity in those settings.

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Black persons. Indeed, now more than ever it is deeply unsafe to be a Black person in America regardless of gender, sexuality, class, and setting.

Yet, to be Black or Indigenous or Trans has always been unsafe. What is new in 2020 is a widespread awareness of racism and great momentum from across American society and, indeed, the world, to work toward change. This awareness and the associated momentum has resulted in, for some, personal learning and work toward becoming an antiracist. Others have joined Black Lives Matter protests, some protests that are still ongoing as of the writing of this chapter in September 2020. Still others in positions of power have worked to change company policies, hire more Persons of Color, create more inclusive hiring policies, and make marketing more representative. Yet, at the same time, others have worked to re-assert white superiority, doubled-down on “All Lives Matter” rhetoric, worked to reinforce racial hierarchies, and engaged in further violence against Black and Trans persons. As faculty, staff, and administrators in higher education, we will encounter students from across the spectrum of awareness in our classroom (and, perhaps, encounter colleagues from both groups as well). Institutions of higher education and the people who work there have a critical opportunity to provide opportunities for those learning about and committed to social justice and becoming antiracist to do just that by deepening their awareness of injustice and inequity and learn how to enact antiracist, inclusive, and equitable practices into their daily lives. Too, higher education provides a space to challenge antiracist beliefs and behaviors and, if not to change deeply held entrenched beliefs, to at least propose an alternative way to view the world. Through antiracist, inclusive, and feminist pedagogies, higher education practitioners can effect larger societal change by educating future decision-makers while also changing the nature of higher education itself by making it a better place—more inclusive, diverse, equitable, and empowering.

In the *Teaching and Learning for Social Justice in Higher Education* series, our goal is to draw on the most updated knowledge about the science of learning and effective teaching to recommend actionable approaches to improve the practices of student affairs, advising, and career services professionals in ways that promote social justice. In Volume I, the chapters focused on theory of teaching and learning and, through a critical lens and informed by other theories of higher education and adult learning, provided an application of how that theory can be reconceptualized and reconstructed to promote equity and diversity. In Volume II,

authors apply critical, feminist, decolonial, and antiracist pedagogies to promote social justice in specific content areas. In each chapter, authors discuss and demonstrate how to teach through a social justice lens in their own fields from STEM fields to psychology to educational leadership. In doing so, each chapter presents both context critical for understanding how their field of study has reinforced racist, gendered, or colonizing systems and structures and provides actionable ways to address, counter, and change those beliefs through teaching and learning decisions. Each chapter provides specific classroom examples and artifacts, both lesson plans or a sample syllabus.

Chapter 2, *Courageous Conversations about Race in an Online Education Course*, provides recommendations for fostering courageous conversations about race in online settings, using the example of an online social work class. In this chapter, the author provides recommendations that support the development of dispositions that promote reflection and action—important components of social justice education.

Chapter 3, *Promoting a Social Orientation Among Students of Color in Psychology*, authors discuss how to help students of color develop a value orientation toward social justice in an introductory psychology course. They provide examples of how syllabus design can inform classroom settings that foster a safe space for discussions about social inequity.

Chapter 4, *Ecological Writing Processes to Promote Environmental and Social Consciousnesses*, provides a deep exploration of how ecological writing processes can be used to promote environmental and social conscious. In this chapter, the author incorporates indigenous and feminist ways of knowing to see how writing assignments can be a part of social (in)justice awareness. Through that lens, this author provides examples of how to develop writing assignments that foster both environmental awareness and acts as a medium to process a new awareness of societal inequity.

Chapter 5, *Incorporating culturally responsive education in STEM Gateway Courses*, presents a model of culturally relevant education in STEM gateway courses, a model based on problem-based learning (PBL).

Extending the usefulness of the PBL model, the authors in Chapter 6, *Teaching Social Justice Through Project-Based Learning in Engineering*, discusses applications of PBL in engineering courses. The authors apply principles from bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* to create PBL activities where students are presented with real-world problems that reflect the lived experiences of women and persons of color.

Chapter 7, *Social Justice and Physics Education*, continues to discuss inequity in STEM education by exploring the history of Physics. By deconstructing this history and uncovering how knowledge that is presented as fact can be both biased and incorrect, the authors provide examples of how to incorporate a history of a field of study into the classroom.

Continuing discussion of the nature of knowledge, Chapter 8, *Promoting Equity in Introductory Biology Classrooms*, presents an approach to teaching biology through a feminist lens. In Chapter 8, the author provides suggestions for evidence-based practices to improve learning through a critical feminist lens.

Chapters 9 and 10 share a focus on the development of cultural competence. In Chapter 9, *Teaching Race and Racism in Social Work Education*, the authors discuss how to foster cultural competence in a social work classroom. Like Chapter 2, the importance of critical conversations is a key element for helping students to develop cultural competence. Chapter 10, *Teaching and Learning for LGBTQ Justice: An Examination of a Professional Learning Series for Faculty Development in Health and Helping Fields*, provides an example of a faculty development workshop designed to help faculty develop competence in teaching and working with their LGBTQ peers.

Like Chapters 4, 11 also provides recommendations for writing activities that promote social justice. In this chapter, *Problematize, Theorize, Politicize, and Contextualize: A Social Justice Framework for Postsecondary Integrated Reading and Writing Instruction*, the authors view literacy as emancipatory through which instructors can create writing activities that prompt students to critically explore their own experiences as a lens to view inequitable systems and structures.

Chapter 12, *What is my educational experience? The Use of Autoethnography as an Instructional Tool in an Online Introduction to Educational Leadership Course*, uses the example of an autoethnography assignment as a way to prompt students to explore their own experiences in education, positive and negative, and seek out literature and research that helps them understand how to make education more equitable.

Chapter 13, *Narratives of Bystanding and Upstanding: Applying a Bystander Framework in Higher Education*, explores student narratives of bystander and upstanding as a lens to help teacher education students understand how to be better upstanders in their own classrooms.

Chapter 14, *Incorporating Antiracist Education Using Aspects of Asian American Studies to Teach about Race and Discrimination*, discusses antiracist pedagogical practices in classroom through the lens of teaching a psychology course. In this chapter, the author discusses how to create inclusive and safe classroom spaces that foster an open dialogue about races, and provides sample activities that use current events as a prompt for a deeper exploration of race and racism in the United States.

Chapter 15, *Open Educational Resources as Tools to Foster Equity*, explores Open Educational Resources (OER) and how they can be used to promote social justice through access and de-centering course readings.

Finally, Chapter 16, *The Role of Power and Oppression in the Classroom: Actualizing the Potential of Intersectionality in Teaching and Learning*, advocates for the use of intersectionality as a viable theoretical and practical approach for addressing social justice in the classroom.

Our hope, across the series, is to create a comprehensive volume that can help higher education practitioners apply the critical science of teaching and learning in higher education to promote social justice through creating more equitable spaces and emancipating access to content, learning environments, and empowerment. This is an unprecedented time and an opportunity to be a part of structural change, and we hope that this volume and series can be a part of working toward structural change through making higher education more equitable and more inclusive for Persons of Color but also to foster a new generation of antiracist graduates who can work for structural and systemic change after graduation.



CHAPTER 2

Courageous Conversations About Race in an Online Education Course

Amy Gratch Hoyle

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Asynchronous Discussion	Asynchronous discussions are online discussions that participants can participate in at any time as opposed to synchronous discussions which take place in real time.
Courageous Conversations	Courageous conversations are conversations that encourage and sustain inter-racial dialogue about race and have the potential to lead to action and progress.
Racism	“In the United States and Canada, racism refers to white racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination, supported by institutional power and authority, used

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White Supremacy

to the advantage of whites and the disadvantage of people of Color. Racism encompasses economic, political, social, and institutional actions and beliefs that perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources, and power between whites and people of Color” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

“The academic term used to capture the all-encompassing dimensions of white privilege, dominance, and assumed superiority in society. These dimensions include: ideology, institutional, social, cultural, historical, political, and interpersonal” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

In response to incidents on campus and throughout the nation, the President of Cabrini University, a small private non-profit institution of higher education, stated that issues around diversity generally and race specifically must be addressed in our community and in our nation (D. Taylor, personal correspondence, October 2016). Addressing such issues requires community members to engage in challenging conversations about race. As Cornel West (1993) articulated, race is an issue in American life that needs critical examination, and this examination must compel us to take action for racial justice. Talking about race and racism is critical to understanding our worlds and can provide a cognitive framework for taking socially responsible action.

Within higher education, schools have a moral imperative to prepare socially responsible critical democratic citizens; discussions about race are necessary “dismantle racism” (Bolgatz, 2005a, p. 5). Specifically, Tatum (1992) argued that universities must create a forum for discussions about race in order to create successful multiracial campuses. Miller and Donner (2000) explain that “dialogues about race and racism offer individuals an opportunity to explore who they are in relation to others while also affording them the opportunity to ponder the meanings of their own and others’ social identity and group membership” (p. 34). In this chapter, we refer to these forums when they are held in the classroom as “courageous conversations.” Understanding of self and others can be a basis for taking

action for more socially just communities. Yet, creating such a forum for discussions about race on a college campus poses a number of challenges. For instance, faculty members are often reluctant to have these conversations fearing they are unprepared and may sound racist themselves. In addition, faculty are reluctant because conversations about race can be divisive (Bolgatz, 2005b; Singleton, 2015; Wormell, 2016). Much of the literature and research on the challenges of facilitating discussions about race in the college classroom has been focused on and even assumes a face-to-face environment, but, as online coursework and programs continue to proliferate and become commonplace for even the most traditional of institutions, there is an equal imperative to develop antiracist curriculum and conversations in remote learning settings as well. Facilitating conversations about race in online courses can both change and increase the challenges experienced in traditional face-to-face settings.

This chapter builds on the results of a qualitative study that explored the experiences of students participating in conversations about race and racism in a fully online section of a graduate Sociocultural Foundations of Education course. The course was required for all students completing a Master of Education degree at Cabrini University. In this course, students engaged in discussions about race, racial identity development, white privilege, racism, and racial injustice. I analyzed a single asynchronous threaded discussion in the course; findings revealed ways in which the discussion was and was not productive and provided greater understanding for how to engage students in courageous conversations in asynchronous online discussions. Building on those findings, I recommend several key strategies for promoting productive and constructive courageous conversations about race in online courses and discuss informed pedagogical strategies that interrupt student resistance to these conversations. First, I provide an overview of literature about courageous conversations and online discussions. Second, I describe the findings from the study and the adjustments I made to the Social Foundations course based on the initial research findings. Those changes yielded more constructive conversations about race, privilege, and racism that led to the concrete recommendations for practice I make to conclude this chapter.

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE

Reflecting what is found in the literature (see Bolgatz, 2005b; Singleton, 2015; Tatum, 1992), conversations about race and racism in the higher education classroom are challenging when the course is taught in the traditional face-to-face modality. Research suggests that teachers may avoid conversations about race fearing it will stir things up that they are unprepared to handle. Further, teachers report that they are concerned about saying or doing the wrong thing (Wormell, 2016) and may believe that examining race will actually create or reinforce racism (Bolgatz, 2005a). Indeed, these difficult conversations can be divisive and may result in students opting out of participating or engaging in class (Zuniga et al., 2007).

Strategies for addressing the challenges of facilitating and promoting conversations about race in the traditional, face-to-face classroom setting have been the focus of previous studies (see Bolgatz, 2005a, b; Tatum, 1997; Wormell, 2016). Similarly, there is an abundance of literature that examines and provides guidance for overcoming difficulties teaching online classes generally and in asynchronous online discussions specifically (see Gao et al., 2009, 2013; Gunawardena et al., 2016). There has been little research, however, that examines the challenges of and providing strategies to enhance conversations about race in online courses. Given the increase in the number of online courses and programs in higher education and the overwhelming need to confront racial injustice, it is essential to understand both the uniqueness of the online environment and the practices that help respond to facilitating learning about a deeply challenging topic, race and racism, in a distance setting.

One such pedagogical method is the “courageous conversation.” According to Singleton and Hays (2008), “courageous conversation is a strategy for breaking down racial tensions and raising racism as a topic of discussion that allows those who possess knowledge on particular topics to have the opportunity to share it, and those who do not have the knowledge to learn and grow from the experience” (p. 18). Singleton (2015) argues that courageous conversation “engages those who won’t talk; sustains the conversation when it gets uncomfortable or diverted; [and] deepens the conversation to the point where authentic understanding and meaningful actions occur” (p. 26). They provide the opportunity for people to “work together to create solutions for problems about which we are afraid to talk” (Ferlazzo, 2017). At their best, courageous

conversations lead to action and progress. According to Meyer (2006), controversial discussions such as these may be essential to foster learning and the construction of knowledge. Meyer suggests, “If one’s educational purpose is to create learning, perhaps sensible controversy in any setting [online or face-to-face] is needed to encourage new ways of thinking” (p. 184).

The literature suggests a wide range of reasons to support having dialogues about race and racism in schools. According to Miller and Donner (2000), “dialogues about race and racism offer individuals an opportunity to explore who they are in relation to others while also affording them the opportunity to ponder the meanings of their own and others’ social identity and group membership” (Miller & Donner, 2000, p. 34). Further, Zuniga et al. (2007) suggested that participation in intergroup dialogue “can increase students’ understanding of themselves and others, their comprehension of the roots and operations of structural discrimination and cultural hegemony, and their commitment to take concerted action to create more socially just lives and communities” (pp. 89–90). Not only are there positive outcomes for discussing race and racism, there are negative consequences when it is not addressed. When teachers fail to talk about race, the curriculum is impacted and the “hidden curriculum teaches a powerful message that race and racism are not worthy of students’ attention” (Bolgatz, 2005b, p. 34).

However, conversations about race, especially interracial dialogues, are uncomfortable and can even be dangerous (Singleton & Hays, 2008). According to Wormell (2016), instructors often avoid such conversations in schools, afraid of stirring up divisive emotions and opinions that they are not prepared to handle. They may also be afraid of losing friends, saying or doing something wrong, or appearing racist and also fear that examining race explicitly might reinforce racism (Bolgatz, 2005b). Therefore, preparing and supporting instructors with strategies for facilitating difficult conversations is critical.

Strategies for Courageous Conversations

The literature includes a range of principles and strategies to promote conversations about race and racism. Bolgatz (2005b) suggested that overall “putting the issue of race on the table is not a matter of charisma. Rather it is about taking risks, being open to hearing what students think,