

The Evolution of Antiracist Pedagogical Work: Pushing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to Undermine Oppressive Structures in Our Communication Classrooms

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Abstract

In this paper, I explore the evolution of antiracist pedagogy. This paper helps to answer for communication educators: How did antiracist pedagogy emerge? Why did antiracist pedagogy emerge? Who does antiracist pedagogy serve? Exploring the historical context of multiculturalism, critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, antiracist pedagogy, and Whiteness studies provides a broad range of theoretical perspectives on multiculturalism as well as the how and why antiracist pedagogy emerged as a site for study. After reading this essay, educators should understand the need to push DEI to include antiracist work in our research, classrooms, and educational initiatives with our future educators, graduate teaching assistants.

Portions of this paper can be found in the author's dissertation.

Fighting racism in the realm of ideas alone without undermining the structures that give birth to those ideas is a hopeless mission (Ayers, 1997, p. 133).

DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) is a buzzword in both the academic realm (elementary, secondary, and higher education) and the workplace. A quick search of DEI jobs on search engines like Indeed.com pulls up hundreds of positions across the country from human resources to instructional development. DEI is important work and current events in the United

States have pushed these issues to the forefront¹ of academic and organizational conversations with the creation of new positions, new missions, and a recognition that there is a significant need to hire non-white, racially diverse faculty, staff, and employees. These conversations, however, often lack an understanding of the systematic nature of oppression. Consequently, adding new positions, adding new mission statements, and adding new initiatives does little to overhaul and create meaningful change in these institutions. As Ayers (1997) argues above, we must push for less additive approaches and move to action. As someone who has studied antiracist pedagogy for nearly 25 years, I understand the systematic nature of racism and I argue racism is more than individuals being cruel or unjust to other individuals. I also contend that I cannot just “fix” one person; this will not cure all the ills of racism. Reinforcing this need was a conversation I had recently with a co-worker at my university about the systemic nature of racism; I was reminded that while I have been immersed in the study of and active in social justice work of antiracist pedagogy for over two decades, it is a new concept for many people I encounter daily. After this conversation with my co-worker, I had to pause and consider the ways in which I am not representative of what people know about the history of multicultural education in higher education nor was there an understanding of how and why antiracist pedagogy emerged as a way to push multicultural education in new directions – to undermine the structures that gave birth to racism.

Nearly 20 years ago, I examined how graduate teaching assistants in a communication studies doctoral program worked to integrate antiracist pedagogy in the basic communication

¹ I use the term “forefront” because these issues did not suddenly appear due to George Floyd’s murder or the current pushback against what is believed to be Critical Race Theory in the public school curriculum – these issues have always been embedded in our cultural fabric of the United States– it took a horrific, senseless murder to wake some people up to the systematic nature of racism in our society.

course. In doing so, I traced the history of diversity in education from multicultural education to whiteness and pedagogy. How did antiracist pedagogy with work in Whiteness in the field of communication push the work of multiculturalists to uproot the hidden curriculum and other structural forms of racism in the classroom (from teacher verbal and nonverbal behaviors to the choice of textbooks educators use in the classroom to teaching strategies employed by educators in the college classroom)? The paper revisits how antiracist pedagogy emerged by exploring the historical context of multiculturalism, critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, antiracist pedagogy, and Whiteness studies. This essay provides a broad range of theoretical perspectives on multiculturalism as well as the how and why antiracist pedagogy emerged as a site for study. After reading this essay, educators should understand the need to push DEI to include antiracist work in our research, classrooms, and educational initiatives, particularly with our future educators, graduate teaching assistants.

In what follows, I present several different theoretical perspectives on multicultural education from the education and communication disciplines. I begin by presenting the historical background of multicultural education. Once the historical background of multicultural education is in place, I explain how critical pedagogy plays a key role in the changing tide of traditional multicultural strategies in the classroom. Next, I discuss the emergence of critical multiculturalism. Third, I present antiracist pedagogy with work in Whiteness studies to offer opportunities to those who are new to the ideas to learn where “we” started in academia and where we are today. Finally, this essay ends with suggestions for educators to push diversity, inclusion and equity curriculum toward antiracist work in their classrooms.

The Multicultural Education Movement: Responding to the Need for Curricular Change

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, a discourse of social change was at the forefront for social activists (Sleeter, 1998, xiii). One element of this discourse for social change was multicultural education, also known at the time as ethnic studies. Racism and inequality were the main concerns of activists during the multicultural education movement. Sleeter (1996) explained that multicultural education was seen as an opportunity to bring minority voices into the classroom, and to redistribute power and economic resources (p. 137).

Banks (1991a) explained that a major goal of the multicultural education movement was “a reformulation of the canon that is used to select and evaluate knowledge for inclusion into the school and university curriculum” (p. 127). Educators of color were concerned that White teachers, in particular, did not understand the backgrounds and life experiences of their students of color (McIntyre, 1997). Consequently, the teaching practices of White teachers worked to reinforce the myth that “difference meant deficiency” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 9). McIntyre (1997) illustrated the significance of multicultural education:

Multiethnic education was seen as a beacon for those who wanted to cross the educational borders and challenge existing forms of institutional and cultural racism. African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups demanded the educational institution reform their curricula, hire minority teachers, create ethnic studies programs, and give more control to communities over how their schools were structured. They saw their work as being antiracist in nature and as being situated in a sociopolitical context. (p. 10)

Originally, this movement was met with optimism and “a readiness to address the inequities within the educational system” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 10). New laws were passed supporting bilingual education, funding was provided for multiethnic curriculum development, students with disabilities were required to be mainstreamed, and the vision of inequality seemed to be captured in the educational community. During the early 1980s, however, the multicultural movement in education was met with contempt and a “ubiquitous language that has suffered considerably at the hands of educators and policy makers alike” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 10). To many educators, multicultural education became understood to add recognition of minority groups to the curriculum. However, in practice this meant that multicultural education became the way to insert or add minority perspectives, leaving the dominant perspectives at the core of the curriculum (Newman-Phillips, 1995, p. 371).

By the mid-1980s, demographic reports indicated that people of color would become the majority in the US by the twenty-first century. Multicultural education became a central focus of education once again. The renewed attention to multicultural education manifested itself in workshops at the K-12 level. According to Sleeter and McLaren (1995) multicultural education became “in’ again, with many teachers interpreting it to mean teaching supplementary lessons about other cultures” (p. 13). Issues of institutional, systematic, and personal levels of racism were not addressed under this new attempt at bringing multiculturalism into the classroom.

The additive approach to multicultural education had an insignificant impact on the educational experiences of minority students. Multicultural education did not change the chances of social mobility for students of color, the racist attitudes of students within the majority status, nor has multicultural education worked to restructure the curriculum and power relations imbedded in most schools (May, 1999, p.1). McCarthy (1994) argued the impact of

multiculturalism was minimal and education in the 90s was “entrenched in highly selective debates over content, texts, attitudes, and values” (McCarthy, 1994, p. 82). Simultaneously, educators are being confronted with a greater need for incorporating multicultural education into teacher preparation programs because the student body is becoming more racially diverse. Furthermore, the increase in racially and ethnically diverse students in our schools has educators, policy makers, and academics racing to find a multicultural cure (McIntyre, 1997). Critics of multicultural education proposed critical multiculturalism and antiracist pedagogy as the answer to the “additive” approach to culture in the classroom, as these approaches offered a critical examination of systematic racism in the classroom.

Critical Pedagogy: Combating Oppressive Conditions in the Classroom

Critical pedagogy is inspired by liberatory struggles and work in Latin America and elsewhere. While there were many leaders of these efforts, critical pedagogy is most often associated with the work of Paulo Freire. (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). In what follows, I explain how critical pedagogy worked to challenge the existing oppressive conditions in our schools, the role of the teacher and the students in a classroom that embraces critical pedagogy, and how critical pedagogy informed a multicultural approach to education.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is believed by many to have inspired the work of critical educators in America. In Brazil, Freire worked to educate in order to liberate oppressed adults through literacy. Freire (1998) argued that critical pedagogues know “that without a correct way of thinking there can be no critical practice. In other words, the practice of critical teaching, implicit in a correct way of thinking, involves a dynamic and dialectical movement between ‘doing’ and ‘reflecting on doing’” (p. 43). Critical pedagogy allowed students to become active agents as well as empowered students in the classroom. A critical pedagogy in the classroom

requires the teacher to give up traditional teaching methods for new methods that engage and empower students. As early as 1938, Dewey (1938/1997) argued that student involvement was essential to democracy in the classroom.

Democratic power-sharing is a dialogic process that is initiated and directed by a critical teacher but is democratically open to student intervention. The critical pedagogue does not become passive in the classroom. Teachers are still the authority or academic expert, but they "deploy their power and knowledge as democratic authorities who question the status quo and negotiate the curriculum rather than as authoritarian educators who unilaterally make the rules and lecture on preset subject matter" (Shor, 1996, p. 56). Empowering students becomes a collaborative effort between teachers and students engaged in transforming the educational experience. Expanding on the work of Freire and Dewey, Shor (1996) developed a method of democratic power sharing in the classroom. Shor's (1996) notion of democratic power-sharing involved creating new speech communities in which teachers and students work together to promote educational equity (1996, p. 29). Democratic power-sharing enables the student to choose themes to address in the course content based on their backgrounds, interests, and experiences. Engaging materials that are important to students helps them become active, engaged participants in their education.

Critical pedagogy and multicultural education can be used in conjunction to produce more empowering pedagogy for students of color. Sleeter and McLaren (1995) illustrated the power of such a union:

While there is no single narrative of liberation, a brief glance at the historic roots of multicultural education and critical pedagogy illustrates that both developed from

complementary struggles, and further, that narratives of liberation can be pulled away from liberating projects and employed in the service of extant power relations. (p. 11)

When coupled with multiculturalism, critical pedagogy becomes a way for students and teachers to address institutional racism in the school by critiquing the existing monocultural curriculum and the underlying power structures that work to reinforce inequalities in the educational landscape. Critical pedagogy adds an integral component to traditional methods of multicultural education by assisting in identifying and undermining the unequal distributions of power that enable the systemic nature of racism to exist inside and outside the realm of education

Critical Multiculturalism: An Oppositional Educational Discourse

Critical multiculturalism in education emerged as a dramatic shift away from the additive approach to multicultural education. According to Duarte and Smith (2000), critical multiculturalism emerged "as an oppositional educational discourse and is an example of what Peter McLaren (1997) called 'Revolutionary Pedagogy'" (p. 18). Critical multiculturalism also has its roots in the liberatory educational praxis espoused by Paulo Freire (Duarte & Smith, 2000, p. 18). A fundamental assumption of critical multiculturalism is the necessity of restructuring the ideologies and discursive practices that have produced oppressive conditions in our schools for students in the minority position (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Critical multiculturalism, while a distinct perspective, combines several theoretical traditions (Duarte & Smith, 2000) such as antiracism and multiculturalism. Critical multiculturalism is different from multicultural education in that it calls for an undermining of the current educational practices that oppress particular groups of students. In what follows, I discuss the emergence of critical multiculturalism as a tool for combating the existing racism in the curriculum. I explore the existing research engaging critical multiculturalism. This exploration includes examining the

connections between critical multiculturalism and critical pedagogy, exploring how critical multiculturalism is a vehicle for transformative social change, and investigating how critical multiculturalism is utilized in practice.

Critical multiculturalism has its foundation in critical pedagogy. Fundamental to critical multiculturalism is confronting oppressive conditions in the classroom. Critical multiculturalism, like critical pedagogy, applied in the classroom requires the teacher to give up traditional teaching methods for new methods that engage and empower students. According to Duarte and Smith (2000),

Critical multiculturalists attempt to emulate Freire's provisional utopianism, which he and Ira Shor expressed as “the possibility to go beyond tomorrow without being naively idealistic. This utopianism as dialectical relationship between denouncing the present and announcing the future. To anticipate tomorrow by dreaming today” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 186). This foundational perspective is also following in the tradition of John Dewey, and thereby represents an effort to confront anti-democratic practices and ideology by politicizing the educational sphere (p. 18).

The combination of critical pedagogy and multicultural education allows for educators to "create a collective praxis of liberation and social justice in a manner that will aid in the particular concrete struggles of the oppressed" (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995, p. 28).

Several scholars explored how critical multiculturalism can benefit our schools, teachers, students, and wider society. For instance, Sleeter and McLaren (1995) edited a book that is devoted to multicultural education and critical pedagogy. They argued that their book is an attempt to build a coalition that enables educators to create a dialog about multicultural issues as well as providing support and an arena for expressing common concerns about critical

approaches to multiculturalism in the classroom (p. 8). Scholars have studied critical multiculturalism in many ways, including an articulation of the connections and tensions between multicultural education and critical pedagogy, an exploration of critical multiculturalism as transformative social change, and a presentation of critical multicultural practices that can be utilized in the classroom.

A key area of research is the connection between multicultural education and critical pedagogy. For instance, Gay (1995) responded to the challenge to improve the quality of educational opportunities and experiences for all children through the exploration of the similarities between two theoretical orientations – critical pedagogy and multiculturalism (p. 155). Gay (1995) asserted that her discussion:

recognizes that these two movements are not identical, many of their concerns, perspectives, and proposals are analogous with respect to issues of educational access, equity, and excellence in a culturally pluralistic society and world. It builds upon the efforts to explicate connections between multicultural education and critical pedagogy that are offered by such educators as Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant, Warren Crichlow, Cameron McCarthy, Antonia Darder, Jesse Goodman, Etta Hollins, and Kathleen Spencer, Michelle Fine, and Terence O'Connor. (p. 156)

Gay (1995) argued that affirmation, knowledge, and actions are fundamental elements of empowerment and social transformation. Personal power begins when the curriculum and instructional strategies are modified to include cultural validation. A necessary condition for social transformation is knowledge acquisition because knowledge is a form of "cultural capital and possession of it empowers" (Gay, 1995, p. 177).

Grant and Sachs (2000) offered additional insight into the dialogue on critical multiculturalism and critical pedagogy. They demonstrated that postmodern theory can be a useful tool for understanding the role education plays in the complicated task involved with educating a multicultural society (p. 178). According to Grant and Sach (2000), “postmodernism is concerned with rethinking culture and the power relations embodied not only in cultural representations but also material practices” (p. 179). Grant and Sach argued that the postmodern perspective is important for multicultural education for the following two reasons:

First, because it offers another lens through which to analyze and interrogate the literature on school practice and the distribution of culture and power in society. Second, the treatment of difference and Otherness is central to any investigation or understanding of the dynamics of social change, and postmodernism can contribute to how multicultural educators engage in this discussion. (p. 179-180)

They find that the multicultural practices that dominate schools are represented "through the three f's approach: foods, fairs, and festivals" (Grant & Sachs, 2000, p. 189). While food, fairs, and festivals may expose students to new cultures, the three f's do not aid transformative experiences for students of color (Grant & Sachs, 2000, p. 189). Multicultural education and postmodern theory presented students and teachers the opportunity to discover the social, political, and economic ramifications of culture in the classroom.

Nieto (1995) expanded the conversation on critical multiculturalism and critical pedagogy through a consideration of the critiques of multicultural education from several ideological perspectives. She explored the connections between multicultural education and critical pedagogy and addresses the pitfalls endemic to multicultural education. First, she considered three implications of using a critical multicultural education in the classroom. She

argued there is no room for sacred cows in critical multicultural education. She explained that "all educational innovations, strategies, and ideologies must be assessed in terms of their ability to advance student learning and prepare students for their roles as citizens of a democracy" (Nieto, 1995, pp. 208-209). Second, a critical multicultural education includes the voices of students "in order to make substantive meaningful changes to education" (p. 212). Finally, "teachers themselves must be involved in their own reeducation and transformation, including challenging their attitudes, knowledge, and practices" (p. 213). In conclusion, Nieto argued that a critical multicultural education can only be realized when "educators accept the challenge that all our students deserve the right to dream" (p. 214). In other words, Nieto believed that educators must continue to challenge what they know and believe to continue to engage in pedagogical practices that will help their students have a greater access to an education that will help prepare them for life after school.

Scholars also explored the use of critical multiculturalism as a vehicle for transformative social change. Pease-Windy Boy (1995) and Darder (1995) explained the contribution minority educators have made to the empowerment of minority students. Pease-Windy Boy (1995) explores cultural diversity in higher education from an American Indian perspective. She explains that in tribal colleges, "American Indian people have built institutions reflective of the people they serve" (p. 399). For example, while many institutions of higher education are reflective of a White, male Eurocentric ideology, the tribal colleges that Pease-Windy Boy spoke of, represent the beliefs, attitudes, values, and life experiences of the American Indians they serve. She concluded by arguing that educators must critically analyze the educational system or else the results will merely be superficial change (p. 411). Darder (1995) illustrated the contributions of critical Latino educators to the empowerment and development of Latino

students in academics. Darder explored the experiences of Latino students in U. S. schools and provides a general introduction to critical pedagogy. She also considered the contributions of Latino critical educators to shed light on the ways in which culture shapes their interactions with Latino students. Darder (1995) argued that:

Although I believe that to a greater or lesser extent all critical educators and all Latino educators can contribute positively to the education of Latino students, it is the powerful combination of an emancipatory educational approach with the ability to enact and participate actively in the familiar cultural milieu of the student that can fundamentally potentiate the academic development and empowerment of Latino students in the United States. (p. 345)

Darder concluded that teacher education programs must be recreated and transformed to better prepare future teachers for their Latino students.

Murtadha (1995) put African-centered pedagogy in dialogue with liberatory multiculturalism. Murtadha began with a discussion of African-centered ideology and its use in school curriculum "infusion strategies". Murtadha (1995) also explored the need for dialogue with the "Others" as African-centered communities "examine the broad cultural political context of the oppression of women nationally and globally, the suffering of ethnic groups both nationally and globally as well as concerns of people with differing abilities" (p. 349). Murtadha asserted that liberatory multiculturalism is the tie that binds African-centered pedagogy and social reconstruction. The work of liberatory multiculturalists, she argues, can be seen in the teachers who work to develop curricula and classrooms that eliminate oppressive social practices through the restructuring of power relations, and engaging in a fight for freedom (p. 366).

Several scholars have addressed the concerns and suggestions of Murtahda by utilizing critical multicultural theory in the classroom. For example, a curriculum that helps students become actively involved in civic action and social change may transform their educational experience. Banks (1991a) argued that a transformative curriculum cannot be constructed by simply "adding" content about ethnic groups and women to the existing Eurocentric curriculum because the experiences of people of color and women are viewed from the dominant perspective. In Bank's vision, a transformative curriculum designed to empower students (especially victimized and marginalized students) must help teach "students critical thinking skills, the ways in which knowledge is constructed, the basic assumptions and values that undergird knowledge systems, and how to construct knowledge themselves" (p. 131). Banks' development of a new curriculum was designed to help liberate students through an analysis of social issues and to help them learn to take action.

Sleeter's (1996) book, *Multiculturalism as Social Activism*, is devoted to an exploration of the use of critical multiculturalism with students who want to become educators as well as a way for her to reflect upon her own positionality as a White woman from a professional class background. She also situated multicultural education debates politically and identifies themes in minority position discourse that drive multicultural curriculum. Sleeter (1996) explained that her book "attempts to connect political and pedagogical issues with personal experiences and reflections" (p. 15). Her book could be viewed as an example of how an educator might begin to integrate critical multicultural strategies into a college classroom.

Critical multiculturalism emerged as a means to examine the existing structure in schools that allowed particular groups of students to remain underrepresented or tokenized in the curriculum. McLaren (2000) argued that:

as multicultural educators informed by critical and feminist pedagogies, we need to keep students connected to the power of the unacceptable and comfortable with the unthinkable by producing critical forms of policy analysis and pedagogy. (p. 236)

Critical multiculturalism is linked to the liberatory practice of critical pedagogues such as Paulo Freire. While these two theoretical orientations are not the same, they both share the goal of transformative social change. Critical multiculturalist research takes the form of exploring connections and tensions between critical multiculturalism and critical pedagogy, as a form of transformative social change, and as a means for pedagogy in the classroom.

Antiracist Pedagogy: Addressing Systematic and Structural Racism

Antiracist pedagogy is fundamentally an interdisciplinary approach that challenges the existing norms in our classroom that uphold the systematic nature of racism. Antiracist pedagogy examined how and why particular groups are marginalized in our schools and larger society and confronted racism as an institutional problem. Antiracist pedagogy, while similar to critical multiculturalism in that both concentrate on challenging the existing oppressive conditions found in our schools, is centered in Whiteness studies. According to Treinen (2004) “Whiteness needs blackness to maintain its purity and normality. The historical inequalities that non-Whites have faced in our country are the direct result of placing Whiteness in binary opposition with blackness” (p. 141). Antiracist educators argue that through a naming and marking of the White center of power, space can be made for the voices of those oppressed by systematic racism.

Education scholars have been at the forefront of producing research on antiracist pedagogy. The discipline of education has examined antiracist pedagogy in and out of the classroom, with White teachers and preservice education students, and in the media and popular culture. One such study by McIntyre (1997) explored how White student teachers made meaning

of Whiteness. Through a series of focus groups and interviews, McIntyre discovered that "for these young White females, being White is normal, typical, and functions as a standard for what is right, what is good, and what is true" (p. 135). Diaz-Rico (1998) argued for an antiracist education for preservice English-as-a-Second-Language teachers. Through a course titled "Teaching in a Multicultural Society," preservice teachers are given the opportunity to increase their effectiveness in providing non-mainstream students greater access to the core curriculum. Diaz-Rico (1998) asked teachers to explore their past beliefs about several subjects including genetic inferiority/superiority, institutional racism, and the employment of a curriculum free from bias (p. 71).

Educators have framed their antiracist work through research in the classroom. For instance, Maher and Tetreault (1997) revisited data they presented in their book, *The Feminist Classroom* (1994), to interrogate the effects of Whiteness on their original work. Originally, Maher and Tetreault (1997) considered themselves as "sharing a common perspective with the women of color that [they] studied, all of [them] being feminists resisting a male-centered academy" (p. 322). However, what the researchers discovered was that they did not fully interrogate their positionality of privilege. Maher and Tetreault (1997) used theories of Whiteness to understand how Whiteness was formed and the ways in which Whiteness shaped classroom discourse (p. 326). Titone (1998) reflected upon her time as a teacher education student and her current work as an antiracist pedagogue to argue why it is imperative for students to unlearn racism and teachers to develop their antiracist identities. Titone (1998) maintained that it is critical for "the [W]hite, anti-racist professor to hold a clearly defined antiracist educational philosophy reflecting his or her political commitment" (p. 169). Adding to this research, Rosenberg (1997) spoke from the position of a White teacher educator in a classroom with

predominantly White preservice teachers. She found that students "begin to feel lost in conversations of race and racism, especially when they begin to explore what it means to be [W]hite" (p. 80). Rosenberg (1997) maintained "we clearly need a new way of thinking about the *place* within which this type of work [conversations about Whiteness, race, and racism] can happen, and the *process* we engage in with our students and ourselves" (p. 87).

Adding to the research being conducted with preservice teachers is antiracist pedagogical research on classroom practice and the curriculum. Fine (1997) worked to chart "a theoretical argument about the institutional processes by which 'whiteness' is today produced as advantage through schools and the economy" (p. 58). Fine (1997) made a plea "to re-search institutions: to notice, to remove the [W]hite glaucoma that has ruined scholarly vision, as we lift up the school and work-related dynamics that make [W]hites and other racial groups seems so separable, and so relentlessly rank ordered" (p. 58). Additionally, Ellsworth (1997) used Carr's (1994) essay, "An American Tale: A Lynching and Legacies Left Behind," in graduate classes in education to confront how some antiracist research positions the White reader in various double binds (p. 263). For example, a White person may be working to fight against racism while simultaneously perpetrating racism in his/her classroom through the curriculum and/or the teaching practices. Ellsworth (1997) concludes by maintaining that "part of the racist potential of [W]hiteness as a dynamic of social production and interrelation, lies precisely in the ways that its academic performances can be made into double binds" (p. 268). Ellsworth (1997) was not proposing that the double bind should let White educators "off the hook"; instead, Ellsworth argued we must continue to locate and confront the double binds in the classroom and in our academic research.

Giroux (1997) expanded the work of antiracist pedagogues by examining how two films, *Dangerous Minds* and *Sutures*, can be used as pedagogical tools in the classroom to explore the

implications of Whiteness in the media. Giroux (1997) argued that by positioning [W]hiteness in a notion of cultural citizenship that affirms difference politically, culturally, and socially, students can see how their [W]hiteness functions as a racial identity while still being critical of how those forms of [W]hiteness are structured in dominance and aligned with exploitative interests and oppressive social relations. (p. 312) Giroux (1997) challenged teachers, students, and others to come to terms with Whiteness and take up the challenge in the classroom of confronting the systematic nature of racism.

Antiracist pedagogy is based on a theoretical perspective that exposes the ways in which racism is manifested in our classrooms and wider society. Essential to and at the center of antiracist pedagogy is the study of Whiteness. Antiracist pedagogues have researched the role of Whiteness in antiracist pedagogy, how antiracist pedagogy manifests itself in classroom practice, and how the media can be utilized as an antiracist teaching tool. Antiracist pedagogy articulates a way to disrupt the inequities that exist in our schools, institutions, and wider society.

Whiteness Studies: Examining the Power of the Invisible Norm

It is important for us to remember that the struggle to end [W]hite supremacy is a struggle to change a system, a structure . . . For our effort to end [W]hite supremacy to be truly effective, individual struggle to change consciousness must be fundamentally linked to collective effort to transform those structures that reinforce and perpetuate [W]hite supremacy. (hooks, 2000, p. 117)

Fundamental to the antiracist pedagogue's struggle to end White supremacy is an interrogation of the role that Whiteness plays in the oppression of others. In the past three decades, Communication scholars have offered several complex and valuable theories of Whiteness that can enhance the teaching practice of educators. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) wrote a groundbreaking essay on the rhetoric of Whiteness. They studied the discursive space of Whiteness and argued that "'White' is a relatively uncharted territory that has remained invisible

as it continues to influence the identity of those both within and without its domain” (p. 291). In what follows, I present literature that examines the normative space known as “Whiteness” as it influences systemic and institutional racism in our schools and society. I begin by presenting research that explores the rhetorical location of Whiteness and continue by presenting research that explores the role Whiteness plays in identity formation. Finally, I present the extant communication research that examines Whiteness in the classroom setting.

In their article, “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric,” Nakayama and Krizek (1995) mapped the marking of the territories of Whiteness. Through the mapping, they made the critical “move of not allowing White subjectivity to assume the position of the universal subject – with its unmarked territory” (p. 298). Nakayama and Krizek (1995) concluded by urging educators/scholars to consider “[W]hiteness in the context of social relations, such as gender, sexual orientation, class, [and] religion” (p. 305). Since this work first appeared, several communication scholars have followed with studies that work to deconstruct Whiteness as the rhetorical center of power and privilege (e.g., Shome, 1996, Crenshaw, 1997, Jackson, 1999, Mcduffie, 2018, Calvente et al., 2020).

Several scholars examined the rhetorical location of Whiteness within an antiracist framework. Furthering the work of Nakayama and Krizek (1995), Shome (1996), Crenshaw (1997), and Jackson (1999) examined Whiteness with an understanding of how and why non-White groups are culturally marginalized. Shome’s (1996) essay focused on the movie, *City of Joy* to examine one instance of the discursive construction of Whiteness in media representations. Crenshaw (1997) explicitly accepted Nakayama and Krizek’s invitation to move beyond their study by investigating how the rhetoric of Whiteness functions in other contexts such as gender. Crenshaw (1997) explored the rhetorical dimensions of Whiteness in a debate

between Carolyn Moseley Braun and Jesse Helms over the Senate's decision on whether to grant a fourteen-year extension of a design patent to the United Daughters of the Confederacy's insignia, which many claim is a symbol of slavery and racism. These two articles offer a critique of two historically White dominated spaces – politics and the media – to make White visible, and to overturn its rhetorical silence (Crenshaw, 1997).

Jackson (1999) uses Nakayama and Krizek's (1995) mapping technique to understand the ontological territory known as Whiteness. Jackson's study is unique in that White participants analyze what White culture means. In his study, Jackson (1999) found that Whiteness is:

- (1) incompleteness, (2) interrogatable space, (3) metaphor for the universal insider, (4) guilty and fair space, and (5) situationally immutable. Metaphorically, each strategy occupies its own territory, a space that can be further constructed and explored. (p. 46)

Answering the call of bell hooks (1990) for a discourse on race that interrogates Whiteness, Moon (1999), similarly, offered a critical reading of White women's narratives about Whiteness. In this essay, Moon (1999) attempted to “displace [W]hiteness as the universal stance” and “attempts to map a number of discursive practices that work to produce and reproduce ‘Whiteness’” (p. 178). She discovered several communication practices that constitute “Whitespeak,” support the reproduction of good (White) girls, and produce safe spaces where Whiteness can be maintained. Moon (1999) asserted that White women must take an active role in rearticulating a vision of White people and abolish White supremacy at the forefront of their political and personal agendas (p. 196). These scholars provided communication scholars compelling explanations as to how and why Whiteness gets rhetorically positioned as the invisible center of power.

Scholars have also concentrated their attention on the role Whiteness plays in identity formation. For instance, Martin et al. (1999) examined the preferences and meanings of labels for White Americans at a time when some Whites are perceiving that they occupy a minority status for the first time (p. 28). Martin et al. (1999) argued that their exploration of labels for Whiteness is “an attempt to better understand this phantom center that has not only masked its own positionality but fueled countless debates over labeling marginalized groups far from this center” (p.47). Furthering the work of Martin et al. (1999), Stage (1999) explored the cultural identity of one small all White Midwestern town. Stage (1999) employs an indigenous perspective (researcher-as-insider) to aid in a much-needed step toward the examination of White culture and to understand how White rural Midwesterners understand their position in society (p. 79). Most recently, McCann et al (2020) examined the racial politics of legitimizing communication through Whiteness. The authors’ argued as the field of communication has chased legitimacy, “the field repetitiously jettisons Blackness” (p. 2). Studies such as these disrupt the naturalness of Whiteness and force Whites to think about their complicity in institutional and personal racism.

Whiteness has also been studied in the communication classroom. For instance, Martin and Davis (2001) address the current interest in Whiteness studies by incorporating it into an intercultural communication classroom. They presented four current topics in Whiteness studies: (1) the foundations of Whiteness studies, (2) the Whitening of U.S. immigrants, (3) White privilege, and (4) White discourse and cultural practices. These authors also suggest strategies to incorporate these four topics into an intercultural communication classroom. Cooks (2003) and Miller and Harris (2005) explore teaching Whiteness in interactions in the classroom. Warren (2001) examines Whiteness through performativity. In his essay, Warren explores how

Whiteness is “performatively accomplished” by students in an entry-level performance communication course (p. 92). Warren (2001) argued that “the generative power of performativity – the potential of locating race in its own process of reiteration – offers us the possibility of interrupting the discursive process of racial formation, as well as the naturalization and sedimentation of those racial categories.

Treinen and Warren (2001) offered (for the time) a novel approach to teaching cultural communication in the basic speech course through an examination of the role of Whiteness in institutional and systemic racism in the communication classroom. According to Treinen and Warren (2001), antiracist pedagogy is often missing from the basic speech communication course curriculum. In response, they encourage communication educators to “problematize the unexamined cultural center to better understand how Whiteness affects our teaching, curriculum, and students (p. 49). They offered modifications to teaching the basic course that address culture in a systematic way rather than the additive approach that is commonly used in studying cultural communication. Matias and Mackey (2016) proposed a Critical Whiteness pedagogy and Ohito (2020) explored the enactment of whiteness in antiracist pedagogy. Treinen (2014/2015) argued for antiracist pedagogy with work in whiteness studies in the training and development of graduate teaching assistants.

Although interrogating the taken-for-grantedness of Whiteness is not always central to the work of antiracist pedagogues, many scholars would argue that in order to engage in antiracist pedagogy one must deconstruct the power and privilege inherent in Whiteness. This examination then should lead to a new way of understanding and constructing Whiteness in our schools, institutions, and wider society. There are several ways to explore Whiteness. For instance, researchers examine the role of Whiteness in identity formation. Whiteness has been

studied as a rhetorical location. Whiteness has also been studied in the classroom setting. Engaging in Whiteness studies offers antiracist pedagogues a lens for examining and disrupting the ways in which racism is perpetuated through the invisibility of Whiteness.

Hey, I'm a White Educator. What can I do to help?

With the events surrounding the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN to the recent murder of North High (Minneapolis, MN) football and basketball star Deshaun Hill to social media posts of the racist rants of high school students in Prior Lake, MN, New Prague, MN and Minnetonka, MN disrupting racism is not something we, as White educators, cannot hide from. It is a part of the fabric of our lives – impacting our students and their communities. So, I write this section for White educators. What can we do?

From this literature review, the charge is clear – more research and exploratory essays need to be done to document to help us, as a discipline, understand how we are impacting the work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and racism in the classroom for new instructors of higher education and the students in our communication classrooms. For White educators compelled to embrace the call to move away from teaching multiculturalism in the classroom and address systematic racism in our schools and our communities, there are ways to begin the work. I say work because that is what one must do. This is not the easy approach where we just celebrate cultures and engage in a “foods, fun, and festivals” approach to multiculturalism. If you, as a White educator desire change, you must be that change. The change begins at home, in your own self-examination about your beliefs, attitudes and values. To what degree are you privileged? How does that privilege impact the way you teach, what you teach, and how you teach? How do your values, attitudes, and beliefs impact your communication (behaviors) in the classroom with your students? White educators need to be ready to spend time educating themselves.

White educators can begin the work by examining who they are – what do they bring to the table in terms of value, attitudes and beliefs – as educators and members of their communities. I ask my students this question at the beginning of all my courses from lower-level general education courses such as public speaking and interpersonal communication to my undergraduate/graduate course in Whiteness and Communication. Why do I ask this question? Everyone in the classroom community, including myself, bring attitudes, values, and beliefs that have shaped our identities and the way we communicate/ behave with others. While all students have a general sense that our communication impacts others, far fewer of them have spent time exploring themselves – Who are they? What do they bring to the class in the form of values and attitudes? How does their background and upbringing come to play in the way they communicate with others? How do these attitudes and values impact their behaviors? If I ask my students to be introspective and engage in self-analysis, I expect them to want the same from me. As a White educator, I cannot imagine walking into a classroom, teaching about racism having not done the work to understand my role in institutional racism and the privilege my White body carries with it when I walk into the classroom.

Once a White educator has begun the process of self-examination, I suggest a reading by Rowe and Malhotra called *(Un)Hinging Whiteness* (2006). In this essay, the authors help the reader examine the idea of whiteness and how Whiteness can be taught in the classroom without re-centering White educators and White students. They explain:

To do so, we untangle the distinctions between whiteness as a universalizing, privileging process and white identity and/or the white body. This distinction is important for two reasons: to provide a space to theorize and teach whiteness as a multiracial phenomenon,

as opposed to an identity that holds meaning only for white people; and to empower students and educators to act against white supremacy. (p. 166)

The reference section of this paper offers a wealth of readings to offer historical context to antiracist education and whiteness studies. For those who prefer other formats, there are some wonderful books published that examine a variety of ideas surrounding racism, such as *Just Us: An American Conversation* (Rankine, 2020) *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* (McGhee, 2021), *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of how our Government Segregated America* (Rothstein, 2017), *Nice Racism: How Progressive Whiten People Perpetuate Racial Harm* (DiAngelo, 2021) and/or *Seeing White: An Introduction to White Privilege and Race* (Halley, et al., 2011). These books offer a starting point to examine our part in the system of racism in our communities and in our schools.

Documentaries and podcasts also provide a rich view of our racial history. *Race the Power of an Illusion* is a staple in my classrooms. This documentary explores how race was created in order to dehumanize black and brown folks and ensure that “all men are created equal” only meant White men. If you are interested in how policies impacted institutional racism *Jim Crow of the North* (2019) and *13th* (2020) are places to start. If you like podcasts, *Seeing White* (2017) hosted by John Biewen (a MN native), *Asian Enough* (2020) with hosts Jen Yamato, Johana Bhuiyan, Tracy Brown and Suhauna Hussain, or *Coming Through*. (2020) with Rebecca Carrol.

Finally, professional development opportunities are a way to both improve our teaching and stay current on anything from research to new teaching strategies. Attend conference paper presentations and panel discussions on issues about antiracism and social justice in education. Enroll in webinars, symposiums, special presentations, and discussions offered by community

groups, your workplace, or local university/college. Staying current on issues facing your community is imperative to understanding the world in which our students are living. The exploration process as well as ongoing professional development opportunities will help White educators build a curriculum that reflects the voices of all their students. Everything you watch, read, listen to, and learn become your resources for teaching.

As I was writing this section, I was thinking about this quotation: “Be the change you want to see in the world,” a quote often attributed to Mahatma Gandhi. After further investigation, I found the actual quotation from Gandhi. One with deeper meaning; pushing “us” to be the change we want to see in the world; what we must do, if we embrace the charge to become antiracist educators:

We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man[woman] changes his[her] own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. This is the divine mystery supreme. A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness. We need not wait to see what others do. (Morton, 2011, par. 5)

Gandhi urges us not to wait for others to be the change. The worst thing White folks can do is wait for BIPOC scholars, experts, and activists to “teach” what to do – it is not their responsibility. White educators need to do the work. Educate yourself. Reflect upon who you are. Examine what you bring to the table. Support your BIPOC colleagues and BIPOC students through antiracist education.

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