

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in TPC: Antiracist Pedagogy and Becoming an Antiracist Educator

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Abstract. As the field of technical and professional communication (TPC) continues to find and fill the gaps in research to create, promote, and implement strategies and knowledge around antiracist pedagogy, it is essential for all TPC instructors to take on the task of becoming aware and well-informed antiracist educators, as well as for TPC programs to participate in antiracism initiatives. Doing so will better serve historically marginalized communities and continue progressing as a field in higher education institutions (HEIs), thereby, making strides towards diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Keywords: technical communication, professional communication, technical and professional communication, programmatic administration, social justice, diversity, inclusivity

Introduction

Amid our political climate, the academic world has fought to become more inclusive and integrate culturally responsive teachings in our educational systems. It became national news when banning the teaching and use of critical race theory became a topic of conversation among the educational system. According to the National Public Radio (NPR) public universities began removing the requirement for students to take diversity training in states like Texas, who have been historically conservative with the kind of material they allow in the classrooms (Florida, 2021). The arti-

cle reads “it would require teachers who discuss ugly episodes in history or controversial current events to explore ‘contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective’” (3). Students come into higher education institutions wanting to have these conversations around race, and it is essential for all educators, especially in technical and professional communication (TPC), to become well-rounded and knowledgeable anti-racist pedagogy experts; to ensure that we are not deflecting our own racist tendencies, nor our prejudices or biases that may be influencing our own pedagogy; and in turn, directly influencing our students.

Education specialists including Mollie K. Galloway, Petra Callin, Shay James, Hariette Vimignon, & Lisa McCall (2019) supported the “closing gaps in resources, access, opportunities, and outcomes for students of color and other minoritized groups requires educators to understand and enact culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy” (p. 485). Similarly, Niemonem (2007) explains that “antiracist education is understood as a set of pedagogical, curricular and organizational strategies that hope to promote racial equality by identifying, then eliminating, white privilege” (p. 160). A student’s race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, among other identifiers cannot be left at the door. Their multifaceted identities follow them into the classroom and influence and shape the world around them. According to Pimentel, Pimentel, and Dean’s (2016) chapter in *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing and Communication*, “an antiracist pedagogical approach allows students and professors to “evaluate their own places of privilege or non-privilege within society while trying to displace instances of racism” (p. 112) in and outside the classroom.

Moreover, I call for mandatory training and accessible resources for educators, so they may pass on valuable knowledge and teachings through the utilization of antiracist pedagogy; more specifically, the professionals and educators of TPC. By doing so, we would develop a deeper understanding of the unique, diverse populations that join our institutions, as well as how to better advocate for them when individuals are faced with racism and/or discrimination in and outside the classroom. For example, Young K. Kim & Linda J Sax (2009) noted that “first-generation college students tend to less frequently assist faculty with research for course credit, communicate with faculty outside of class, and interact with faculty during lecture class sessions than non-first-generation students” (p. 452). Kim and Sax found that research-related faculty interaction enhanced “higher college GPAs and degree aspirations” and course-related faculty interaction predicted higher satisfaction (p. 458). Research on how BIPOC women faculty are tasked

with additional service work is also well-documented (Black-Beard, S.; Murrell, A.; & Thomas, D.; 2012). According to Mary Ann Mason, Marc Goulden & Karie Frasch (2009), literature also suggests that minority graduate students also pay a “mentoring tax” in that they must expend more time and effort to develop relationships with mentors than do their White counterparts (p. 12).

Becoming an Antiracist Educator in HEIs

Galloway et al. (2021) found that educators discussed and agreed that engaging in antiracist and anti-oppressive pedagogy and practice means “teaching about white privilege and oppression; identifying and critiquing structural inequalities; highlighting students lived experiences within schools and other institutions as racialized; and calling out and addressing acts of racism” (p. 497). These are just many of the several concepts that we need to begin discussing and implement into our antiracist agenda. There are different steps and paths one can take to become an antiracist educator, but we must all begin now.

Moreover, a qualitative study conducted by Marie Claire Gwayi-Chore, et al. (2021) discussed that campus climates play a significant role in influencing success in recruiting and graduating students. The campus climate is made up of the physical spaces for teaching and learning, resources provided, as well as “perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of students, faculty, and staff regarding their institutions” (p. 2). These findings also supported that “adverse learning climates negatively impact academic performance” (p. 2). The way that higher education institutions (HEIs) are forming the culture and influence on campus, as well as the educators, faculty, and administrators on campus, significantly influences the student body experience.

Chris Dayley and Rebecca Walton (2018) stated that to increase recruitment of students of color into Technical and Professional (TPC) programs, we must “do more to name and shape our programs in ways that are recognizable and memorable to potential students” (p. 6). They point to the current problem by stating “unawareness and misconceptions” of the TPC field serve as barriers with implications not only for recruiting students but increasing the diversity of the student population in TPC programs, a “recognized weakness” of TPC academic programs (p. 6). Dayley and Walton expressed that there is great benefit to understanding underrepresented populations. By increasing our understanding we shift who we are as a discipline, while also assisting us in identifying “where we might be lacking in terms of attracting students from underrepresented backgrounds” (p. 7). By enhancing our understanding, identifying the issues, we can actively address them—

we can become proactive, instead of reactive to these existing issues.

Finally, TPC programs should be committed to not only being diverse, but inclusive. As Dayley and Walton stated “the goal is not only to bring more diverse groups of people into the field but to welcome the range of expertise, experiences, and insights from underrepresented groups in shifting and shaping the identity of the field itself” (p. 10). Through the knowledge we gain from antiracist pedagogy, we are taking the correct steps to becoming more inclusive as a field.

Becoming an Antiracist Educator in TPC

Numerous HEIs have taken action to ensure that university faculty, educators, and administrators have resources, tools, and knowledge that allow them to understand the importance of antiracist pedagogy and how to become an antiracist educator. While we have made some progress in some areas of the U.S., there is room for improvement, specifically in the field of TPC. Through the recognition and awareness of social injustices that occur in and outside of the classroom, and how these external influences (i.e. racism and discrimination) are directly influences our historically marginalized students, microaggressions and discrimination, we can better equip ourselves and others to fight back. Though the discussion topic of racism, white privilege, and oppression can be uncomfortable to discuss, it is essential to become knowledgeable in antiracist pedagogy so we can become well-rounded and culturally responsive educators.

Whether educators are at the beginning of their journey in becoming proactively antiracist or are already taking the steps to educate themselves and implement strategies, theories, and methodologies that align with antiracist pedagogy, or refining knowledge, research, and skills, we can work collectively in TPC to create and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in HEI.

Becoming antiracist applies to everyone, not just white educators. Anneliese A. Singh writes in *The Racial Healing Handbook* that all antiracists must not only commit to taking individual action, but collective action. This is what I, as a first-generation Mexican American doctoral student, am asking from every TPC educator. Singh suggested that becoming antiracist as a white person means taking responsibility for your power and privilege and cultivating a desire for understanding and growth. Singh also points out that becoming an antiracist as a person of color means recognizing that there are class differences between people of color, all racial groups are not always united in solidarity, and that we must always be challenging internalized White supremacy.

First, educate yourself on antiracist pedagogy. Second, examine how one can become an antiracist educator within TPC. Third, begin examining your own prejudices, perspectives, and biases, so you may address them and replace them. Fourth, call out and address those who do not engage in antiracist agendas and call university faculty, educators, and administrators to work collectively to become antiracist for the betterment of our communities and the historically marginalized populations being directly affected. And, finally, apply antiracist pedagogical practices and promote antiracist pedagogy and its importance across all educational institutions, and specifically, within the technical and professional communication field.

List of Resources

As a jumping off point, I offer a series of resources that can point one in the right direction as they begin or continue their journey in becoming an antiracist educator. As mentioned before, and with the political climate that we are in, we must acknowledge that not only does racism and discrimination exist in our nation but has a direct impact on the lives of our students, in turn, influencing their academic lives. By acknowledging this, we can lead crucial discussions around race, racism, and discrimination. As educators, it is our responsibility to create safe learning environments, where we recognize ongoing issues revolving around race and how we can collectively work to fight back against social injustices that may be preventing our students from succeeding in HEIs. Let's continue educating ourselves, building research around the importance of antiracist pedagogy, and moving towards becoming aware, antiracist educators.

1. Cagle, Lauren E.; Eble, Michelle F.; Gonzales, Laura; Johnson, Meredith A.; Johnson, Nathan R.; Jones, Natasha N.; Lane, Liz; Mckoy, Temptaous; Moore, Kristen R.; Reynoso, Ricky; Rose, Emma J.; Patterson, GPat; Sánchez, Fernando; Shivers-McNair, Ann; Simmons, Michele; Stone, Erica M.; Tham, Jason; Walton, Rebecca; & Williams, Miriam F. (2021). Anti-racist scholarly reviewing practices: A heuristic for editors, reviewers, and authors. Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/reviewheuristic>.

This document offers guidance on antiracist professional practices in the form of a heuristic for editors, reviewers, and authors involved in academic writing. The way this document can be utilized is broken down into five categories: editors (publicly and officially endorse this heuristic, require use of the heuristic by reviewers); reviewers (consult

the heuristic during your review writing and before submitting your review, mention that you are using this heuristic in your reviews); authors (use this heuristic as a tool to call out and push back against racist editing practices [e.g., by citing it in responses to editors or reviewers], request or recommend reviewers who have signaled support for anti-racist publishing practices by signing onto this document); allies and accomplices (commit to mentoring, supporting, and advocating for marginalized and untenured scholars who encounter racist [and otherwise oppressive] academic publishing practices); and for anyone involved in academic publishing (question what might be missing from these practices once put into action in your specific context, openly discuss these practices with others involved in your process and brainstorm small adjustments based on needs).

2. Condon, Frankie & Young, Vershawn Ashanti (Eds.) (2016). *Performing antiracist pedagogy in rhetoric, writing, and communication*. Fort Collins, CO: The WAC Clearinghouse/University Press of Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.37514/ATD-B.2016.0933>

This book opens the discussion on addressing race and racism in readings and class discussion in writing, rhetoric, and communication discourses but also in wider public settings. The authors, “through various examples of classrooms and exchanges between teachers and students, show us possible directions for antiracist agendas in higher education, showing us paths to walk” (p. xix). This book serves as a great resource that offers research, knowledge, suggestions, and examples that can help us in becoming more antiracist educators.

3. CCCC Black Technical and Professional Writing Task Force. (2020). CCCC Black Technical and Professional Communication Position Statement with Resource Guide. Retrieved from <https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/black-technical-professional-communication>

The CCCC Black Technical and Professional Writing Task Force collectively created a position statement and resource list as initial steps towards “defining Black technical and professional communication practices and practitioners advocating for their inclusion in the body of mainstream disciplinary literature; and carving out the methodological, theoretical, and practical space that will enable other Black scholars in the field to see and do such work. The statement and resource list will also assist teachers and researchers of technical and professional communication.”

4. Inoue, Asao B. (n.d.). Asao B. Inoue's Infrequent Words. Retrieved from <http://asaobinoue.blogspot.com/p/about.html>

Asao B. Inoue works on antiracist writing pedagogy and has a blog that is an extension of his academic work. On his blog, you can find books, media, articles, and chapters on several topics including antiracist classroom writing assessment and racism studies (white supremacy). Among the many works that are available to download and read on this site, there is mention of his new book *Above the Well: An Antiracist Argument From A Boy of Color*. The description reads: "Inoue explores race, language and literacy education through a combination of scholarship, personal history, and even a bit of fiction. Inoue comes to terms with his own languaging practices in his upbringing and schooling, while also arguing that there are racist aspects to English language standards promoted in schools and civic life."

5. Singh, A.A. (2019). *The racial healing handbook: Practical activities to help you challenge privilege, confront systemic racism, and engage in collective healing*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

This book comes with insightful handouts (PDF in references page), which reviews what it means to be antiracist, how to become antiracist as a white person, how to become antiracist as a person of color, and so much more. This handbook gives a step-by-step guide with resources to navigate through current and past experiences with racism, internalized prejudices or biases which readers may be blindly unaware of and how to address them without feeling significant guilt and shame. By healing ourselves, we can begin to help others process through difficult emotions revolving around racism and discrimination, whether we are directly or indirectly involved.

6. Walton, Rebecca; Moore, Kristien R.; & Jones, Natasha N. (2019). *Technical communication after the social justice turn: Building coalitions for action*. New York, NY: Routledge.

This book is one of my personal favorites. Jones, Moore, and Walton not only help technical and professional communicators (TPC) understand how the work of technical communication is complicit in oppression but provide a framework to scholars and practitioners who can integrate principles of social justice in technical communication; as well as recognize, reveal, reject, and replace objective practices. Jones,

Moore, and Walton provide four steps to redress inequity in the daily work of technical and professional communicators: recognize, reveal, reject, and replace—also known as the 4Rs. They propose that TPC can recognize injustices, systemic oppressions complicities in them; reveal these injustices, systemic oppressions, and complicities to others as a call-to-action and (organization/social/political) change; reject injustices, systemic oppressions, and opportunities to perpetuate them; and replace unjust and oppressive practices with intersection coalition-led practices (134).

Programmatic Takeaways

The ultimate goal of this piece on antiracist pedagogy is to encourage all technical and professional communicators to seek the time and resources to further develop an antiracist pedagogy in their classroom so they can then call their colleagues to transform into culturally sensitive and antiracist educators. It truly takes a village to create a domino effect of changes throughout our classrooms and universities, but it all starts with ourselves. Ibram X. Kendi writes “the opposite of racist isn’t ‘not racist.’ It is antiracist... one either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequalities, as an anti-racist” (Simmons, 2019).

As antiracist educators in technical and professional communication, we can work collectively to dismantle systemic racism that is ingrained in society that creates barriers for our students of color. This means that as scholars and educators in the TPC field, we must find ways to reconstruct our curriculum design to integrate antiracist initiatives and pedagogy. As we begin reconstructing our curriculum within the TPC programs, we would then implement program assessments to ensure that we are effectively teaching with compassion and understanding to our diverse and multicultural student body.

To begin that reconstruction and revision, we must focus on transforming ourselves first. With that, I would like to offer programmatic takeaways, as well as recommendations that can be immediately implemented in the classroom for all technical and professional communicators:

- **Engage in self-awareness**—truly allowing yourself the time and space to recognize your own prejudice and/or racist tendencies or ways of thinking as well as acknowledging the power and privilege you may have and how it can be utilized to empower students in the classroom through antiracist pedagogy.
- **Acknowledge the existence of racism**—being able to see past our own discomforts with discrimination and racism in the U.S.

It is essential to acknowledge the social construct of racism. By rising past our ignorance, we can truly listen and engage with our student bodies that experiences racism and discrimination in their social and academic lives, instead of ignoring them or pretending that these issues don't exist.

- **Educate yourself on antiracist pedagogy**—to become antiracist educators or activists in the academic and professional world, we must continuously educate ourselves, as well as compile a list of resources to pass on not only to our other colleagues, but to our classrooms. As more universities are becoming more passionate about becoming inclusive and diverse, it is important for us to understand the experiences our ethnically and culturally diverse students.
- **Participate in the conversation**—though there is a good amount of research on antiracist pedagogy, there is a lot of space in the areas of technical and professional communication for more evidence-based research on antiracist pedagogy, as well as pieces that offer frameworks and resources to educators. It would also be valuable to produce qualitative research projects that examine the use of antiracist theoretical frameworks, projects, and discussions in the classroom, so that we may continue to evolve.
- **Participate in the groundwork**—as we begin evolving into anti-racist educators, our programs and curriculum must follow. We are no longer in a social or political climate where we can continue to ignore the racism and discrimination directly affecting our students in their day-to-day lives, and in turn, affecting their academics. It is essential to begin laying the groundwork to reform our TPC programs and then create assessments to examine the efficiency of the implemented changes so we can continue to evolve and better serve our BIPOC students.

Additionally, some recommendations for technical and professional communication educators to contribute to their classroom would be:

- **Build a space for anti-racist discussion**—creating a safe space for students to be vulnerable and ensuring that boundaries are set before initiating conversation so we continue to protect and support our ethnic and cultural minorities.
- **Establish healthy communication**—reminding students of the benefit of professional communication when having discussions about sensitive topics like racism and discrimination—including using appropriate language, checking sources, and keeping an open mindset.
- **Encourage reflection and examination of personal rhetoric**—

encourage students to examine their own ideas, perspectives, and beliefs. Giving students the time and space to evaluate their own prejudices and perspectives can be valuable because they can then examine the root of those beliefs and/or mindsets, which can lead to a transformation into a more accepting and aware scholar. Remind them that their thoughts and words have the power to influence, persuade, and move others to action.

Closing Statement

As the world continues to change around us, so do our point of views, beliefs, biases, and agendas. We are facing a time where it is necessary for educators to truly focus on building and structuring their own antiracist pedagogies and agendas. Natasha N. Jones, Kristine Moore, and Rebecca Walton (2016) asserted that technical communicators should be committed to social justice because “injustices often live in the mundane choices that technical communicators make: how drop-down menus look, whether a form is translated into another language, if captioning is included in a tutorial video, the default setting on a topic-based authoring system” (p. 163). They, among other scholars and researchers, have continued to support the need for TPC to become antiracist educators and utilize antiracist pedagogical practices. When we join collectively as a field, we move towards inclusion. Jones, Moore, and Walton (2016) called all TPC to action in stating: “your individual devotion to inclusion and social justice matters” (p. 164). Use your power, privilege, and position to apply the theoretical framework and concepts that have been provided to you and do your part to move the field towards inclusivity and achievement of social change. Through collaboration in the brainstorming stages and then collectively taking action, we, educators and administrators in academia, can implement programmatic revisions and additions; thereby, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education institutions across the United States.

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