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History of Antiracism Education: Lessons For Today's Practitioners

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This article presents a definition and a historical perspective of antiracism education. Antiracism education has evolved from what educators called intercultural education in the 1920s, to what now is considered a focus on one's individual racism. Antiracism education interventions are designed to help White students understand the power and privilege they hold in society, and to help students of color unlearn negative stereotypes of Whites and themselves (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997). In addition, this education may prompt all students to examine their personal biases, beliefs, and social interactions around race. The article concludes with interracial dialogue as a pedagogical practice found to be an effective way to teach antiracism education. Researchers and practitioners found interracial dialogue to be successful in positively influencing students' racial attitudes and interracial interactions. Thus, this article offers practitioners a way to approach the complex issue of race with college students.

As colleges and universities, especially predominantly White institutions (PWIs), become more racially diverse, significant tensions among various racial and ethnic groups are a part of the campus climate (Chang, Witt-Sandis, Jones, & Hakuta, 1998; Sedlacek, 1995). Springer, Palmer, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Nora (1996) noted, "Indeed, nearly a quarter of minority students on college campuses report racially or ethnically motivated assaults, vandalism, or harassment; and more than half of minority group members experience related distress as a result" (p. 54). A commonly accepted explanation for this tension is that students come to college with preconceived prejudicial and bigoted opinions of the "other" (Hunt, Bell, Wei, & Ingle, 1992). Since these prejudices and racial incidents run counter to the general educational aim of most colleges and universities, educators look for ways to intervene and interrupt this cycle. Antiracism education is often utilized to help students "recognize, assess, and understand oneself as a member of a particular racial group; become aware of one's own racism; and take steps to affect change" (Corvin & Wiggins, 1989, p. 107). This article defines and traces the history of antiracism education. It begins by describing differing perspectives of viewing the intervention and concludes with a pedagogy that may assist educators in cultivating students' positive racial identity development.

Alternative Perspectives on Antiracism Education

There are many ways to examine antiracism education in the academy, but these multiple perspectives largely fall under two broad orientations: culturally conservative and culturally liberal perspectives. These broad perspectives are reviewed with an eye toward their implications for antiracism education in the academy.

Cultural Conservative Perspective

One school of thought is that antiracism education should not be an aim of higher educational interventions because the attitudes, interactions, and beliefs one holds about race are experiential; they are not based on scientific knowledge. As J. Banks (1996) noted, "One of the important issues in the canon debate is whether personal/cultural knowledge should be considered legitimate knowledge" (p. 64). The college classroom content, cultural conservatives argue, should primarily consist of knowledge that is based on the Western tradition, rather than knowledge that is socially constructed. The Western tradition has been characterized as a Eurocentric, past-oriented, and hierarchical conception of education (Levine, 1996).

Cultural conservatives argue that the way students think about themselves as racial beings, the attitudes they hold about race, and their interracial interactions lie outside the educational aim of colleges and universities largely because these attitudes and actions cannot be held up to the same rigorous scientific standards as "legitimate" knowledge. As Chang (1999) noted, "there is no shortage of nationally recognized scholars who see no academic value in diversity programs and view them as part of higher education's ideological project in sensitivity training" (p. 7).

Proponents of the cultural conservative perspective go on to contend that talking and working on race is not only illegitimate, it is also harmful. Their argument assumes that it is actually the acknowledgment and recognition of racial differences that is contributing to a fracturing of our group identity as citizens of the United States of America (U.S.A.) (Gonzales & Cauce, 1995). The National Endowment for the Humanities (1992) quoted anthropologist Marvin Harris who articulated the cultural conservative fear of a fractured U.S. community:

The alternative is to stand by helplessly as special interest groups tear the United States apart in the name of their separate realities, or to wait until one of them grows strong enough to force its own irrational and subjective brand of reality on all the rest. (p. 39)

Cultural conservatives believe the canon they support has a unifying quality that minimizes differences among racial groups. They believe the canon of cultural liberals has a divisive quality that undermines the notion of a U.S. community (Humphreys, 1997). Understanding this cultural perspective is particularly relevant for educators today because we live in a society that politicians and the media frequently label as *divided*. Students coming to college are entering at a time when debates about the direction of this country are mirroring debates within the academy about what constitutes legitimate knowledge. Helping students understand how the academy is a microcosm of society is one role educators can play in the development of informed students and citizens.

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Cultural Liberal Perspective

Another school of thought is that antiracism education is legitimate knowledge, that knowledge is socially constructed, and that racial identity development can be influenced by education. As Shaefer (1996) noted, despite the debate over the inclusion of race education, "formal education is still regarded as a means to reducing prejudice" (p. 4). We may be able to reduce students' racial prejudices by targeting their racial identity (Helms, 1995; Tatum, 1992). Racial identity development has some cognitive components, but it also has affective and conative aspects in that it relates to people's feelings about various racial groups and their willingness to interact with diverse peers.

Advocates of the cultural liberal perspective value affective identity growth, because they believe attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of students are legitimate sources of knowledge. Axelrod (1981) conceded that affective growth is "the most difficult of educational outcomes to identify and measure. In the eyes of many educators, however, it constitutes the most significant educational objective" (p. 40). Educators who believe in this cultural perspective argued that teachers should not limit their assessment of students to cognitive goals, but assess "the contributions of their course to the overall development of the student" (Roper, 1988, p. 8). Affective and conative growth are just as central to higher education's goals for students as cognitive growth, but they are more difficult to identify and measure because most standardized tests do not focus on students' feelings or behaviors.

Students may display affective and conative development by committing themselves to promoting positive race relations, even though society as a whole, and many times, even family and friends, seem opposed to the idea. This advancement of positive race relations is one sign of a healthy racial identity and is one way students manifest their commitment to antiracism ideals. A commitment to antiracism is also evident when students conduct research in the field, teach other students effective ways to interact with members of different races, or otherwise demonstrate that they are applying antiracism theory to their everyday lives. Being committed to antiracism education is a value held by many educators, particularly those in student affairs who follow professional guidelines and priorities that include valuing diversity, supporting the whole student in their learning, acting to benefit others, and creating welcoming and inclusive environments.

Implications of Perspectives on this Study

There are still many educators, including student affairs professionals, who do not believe in antiracism education. The two perspectives on antiracism set up a tension in higher education. Aboud and Doyle (1996) highlighted this tension when they wrote, "On the one hand, educators do not want to foster prejudice. On the other, many people wonder how we can succeed in reducing prejudice if we don't talk about [race]" (p. 162). This article is not going to repair the rift that exists between these two perspectives. Rather, the perspectives were shared with the intent of letting the reader know there is no consensus in the academy on the inclusion of race in higher education interventions.

Antiracism Education

For some truth in advertising, this article follows the culturally liberal perspective and supports the argument that antiracism education may be effective in reducing students' prejudice. For the purposes of this article, the definition of antiracism follows Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) who contend that antiracism interventions are designed to help White students understand the power and privilege they hold in society, and to help people of color unlearn negative stereotypes of Whites and themselves. Antiracism education is a relatively new term in higher education, yet it has roots in the academy as far back as the 1920s. This next section briefly reviews the historical progression of educational interventions that led to antiracism education.

Intercultural Education Movement: 1924-1941

Intercultural Education is based on the concept of treating people of different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds with respect. The movement began shortly after World War I when Black soldiers returned home to segregated cities and schools. In addition, the economic downturns left racial groups fighting for scarce resources. Educators were contemplating their role in creating peaceful interactions between different groups of people when Rachel Davis DuBois became the founder and first Executive Director of the Service Bureau for Intercultural Education. She was also the first to teach intercultural education in colleges and universities (Montalto, 1982).

At first, DuBois worked in high schools as a social studies teacher, and she focused on helping White students unlearn biases and distortions about race in their textbooks. Later in her career, she recognized that students of color had to also affirm their ethnic and racial identities, and these students' self-esteem and level of cultural awareness were greatly enhanced through her efforts. Once DuBois ventured into the arena of affirming students' of color identities, the intercultural education movement began to dwindle. The Commission on Intercultural Education was downgraded to the status of committee in 1938 and only lasted for two more years (Montalto, 1982).

DuBois was still able to make a lasting impact on the college curriculum. The National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) had been a silent partner of DuBois since 1930. Then the NCCJ Director asked Boston University to have DuBois teach in

the field of intercultural education (Montalto, 1982). DuBois' courses at Boston University and Columbia University were the first courses offered in the field of intercultural education at universities in the United States of America (C. Banks, 1996; Montalto, 1982).

Intergroup Education Movement: 1940s-1950s

Intercultural education is the immediate parent of intergroup education (Cook & Cook, 1970). Intergroup educators believed that education could make a difference in reducing group tensions. J. Banks (1996) noted, "The intergroup education movement during the 1940s and 1950s responded to the race riots and violent conflicts that occurred in the nation's cities in the early 1940s" (p. 37). In an attempt to alleviate tensions between racial groups, intergroup education aimed to "reduce prejudice, to develop interracial understandings, and to foster a shared national American culture" (J. Banks, 1996, p. 37).

Intergroup education differed in some respects from intercultural education because it brought the focus on how teaching influenced students' racial attitudes and behaviors. For instance, Cook and Cook's (1970) four year college study (1945-1949) was a cooperative project in intergroup education aimed at 24 colleges and universities' faculty teaching and student learning in the areas of race, creed, and national culture. The findings revealed White students lacked knowledge and awareness about racial groups as well as held negative attitudes about people who were Jewish, Black, and born outside the United States of America. The researchers of the study implemented several interventions targeted around college course content and specific teaching methods, but the interventions also focused on improving campus activities and programs, personnel and guidance practices, community experiences, area action projects, summer and off-campus workshops, and policies (Cook & Cook, 1970). Thus, very early on, educators attempted to reduce prejudice in the academy through academic courses as well as through co-curricular experiences on campus. Faculty and college student personnel were considered essential in the early antiracism education movements.

Ethnic Studies Movement: 1960s-1970s

The 1960s did not bring an end to racial conflicts. In fact, more student protests and calls for inclusive college content were occurring in the academy. Rose (1997) discussed how students of color began to challenge "what they saw as outrageous biases of the standard content" (p. 246). Ethnic studies emerged, in part, because new students and faculty of color demanded that the content emphasize "the perspective of others" (p. 247). The ethnic studies movement brought academic programs and courses on Chicanos, African-Americans, American Indians, and race relations to colleges and universities (Levine & Cureton, 1992).

In addition to introducing new concepts and faculties to the university, ethnic studies professors often challenged students' established beliefs about people of color. Banks (1997) noted:

Many of the long-established, blatant stereotypic conceptions of people of color that were institutionalized in educational institutions and in the popular culture have disappeared since they were challenged by the ethnic protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s. (p. 14)

Students who took ethnic studies courses reported more positive attitudes toward race than students taking courses not affiliated with ethnic studies (Palmer, 2000).

Despite its success, ethnic studies began to flounder by the late 1980s; due in part to a decrease in outside funding (Butler & Schmitz, 1992) and also attacks that the field was *too political* and *narrowly defined*. Being "too political" meant that the topic of race and racism might incite feelings of anger and animosity. Being "too narrowly defined" meant that rather than focusing on the majority United States racial population (i.e., Whites), people of color were at the center of the inquiry. Educators face this challenge today when constructing antiracism interventions in curricular and co-curricular programs. They wonder how much of people of colors' and Whites' experiences to include. There are strong rationales on both sides as to what interventions should consist of and whose experience should be the main focus.

Multiculturalism Movement: 1980s and 1990s

Multiculturalism came quickly on the heels of ethnic studies and its focus was increasing students' knowledge, awareness, and recognition of the multiple cultures students, faculty, staff, and larger society represented (Rose, 1997). Previous movements, multiculturalists argued, did not address the complexity of issues involved in racial prejudice. Thus, what made multiculturalism different was its belief that awareness of diverse peoples and the many contributions they have made will help colleges eliminate stubborn institutional, societal, and cultural forces, as well as create socially just communities (Scholnick, 1998; Sedlacek, 1995).

A great deal of universities included multiculturalism courses in their curriculum, and many more made it a requirement for college students to take at least one course that focused on stereotypes, prejudice, and the relationship those issues had to the exercise of power in society (Sedlacek, 1995; Springer et al., 1996). Proponents argued that one course may not be enough to affect change in students' attitudes and interactions because issues and debates about difference, unequal power, and exclusion are at the heart of multiculturalism and should comprise an essential, not elective, part of the college curriculum (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 1995). This discussion continues as educators wrestle with how many courses and programs should center on multicultural issues. How much is enough?

Antiracism Education: 1990s-Present

Antiracism education emerged in the 1990s out of multiculturalism and the earlier movements. The focus of antiracism education is individual racism. Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) defined individual racism as, "attitudes and behaviors that carry out and maintain the power relationships of racism" (p. 75). Antiracism education does not concentrate on the cultural, institutional, and societal forces of racism as multiculturalism did. In fact, some proponents argued that the broad term of multiculturalism was an effort to "avoid the topic of race as a psychological construct" (Helms, 1994, p. 287). Conversely, antiracism education builds upon the psychological racial identity development research by Helms (1990) and Tatum (1992). It seeks to have students define and create positive racial identities. Blum (1998) added that the aim of antiracism education should be "righting systemic injustice, reducing prejudice, treating members of other races with respect as individuals, contributing to racial harmony and understanding, [and] learning skills of intervention in racist incidents" (p. 869).

Some researchers argued that the antiracism approach is too focused on individual racism and ignores greater societal, institutional, and cultural forces (McCarthy, 1990). Focusing on individual racism, opponents stated, places too much responsibility on individuals to change and on educators to be change agents. Supporters of antiracism education countered that although positive changes in individuals may not be immediately evident after an antiracism intervention, positive results have been reported from numerous studies (Appel, Cartwright, Smith, & Wolf, 1996; Milem, 1994). The question then arises, are educators up to the challenge of being change agents in dealing with racism?

Interracial Dialogue

One tool that educators have in their toolkit of antiracism educational interventions is interracial dialogue, a successful pedagogical approach that researchers consistently cite as crucial in modifying students' racial attitudes and actions. Interracial dialogue is defined as "an inclusive, facilitated forum for the face-to-face exchange of information, sharing of personal stories, honest expression of emotion, affirmation of values, clarification of viewpoints and deliberation of solutions to serious civic concerns" (DuBois & Hutson, 1997). A facilitator who is trained in race relations, conflict mediation, and group facilitation moderates interracial dialogues. Diverse groups of students and a facilitator sit in a circle and openly discuss personal prejudices and biases in the hope of coming to shared understandings about race. The dialogue process is based on respect, active listening, and a desire to apply learnings to real-world situations, such as incidents of hate or discrimination.

Zuniga, Nagda, and Sevig (2002) found that most campus dialogues are formed around interracial/interethnic issues and serve as an avenue to new self and group identities:

Participants are challenged to position their individual and social identity-based experiences in a much broader social context. Facilitators encourage participants to consider a multi-level method of analysis to explore differences and disagreements across and within social identity groups in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of each other's similar or conflicting perspectives and experiences. (p. 13)

Discussing real experiences of real people may help students understand the role they play in perpetuating racism. These realizations, coupled with other experiences and studies in race, may help students modify their racial attitudes and interactions (Gurin, 1999; Milem, 1994). For instance, a survey of a random sample of over 1,000 students completing a diversity course requirement revealed that courses that utilized a discussion-based pedagogy, such as racial dialogue, were more effective than lecture courses aimed at changing students' attitudes on racial policies (Palmer, 2000).

Challenger (2000) also found interracial dialogue increased students' awareness and understanding of people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, particularly White students. Challenger began using interracial dialogues in his sociology class after two racial incidents occurred on his campus in the 1990s. Approximately 120 sociology students created and moderated dialogues with campus students, faculty, and staff that addressed how to improve race and ethnic relations on campus. The dialogues have been sustained and continue to have an impact on students.

Interracial dialogue can only be as successful as the facilitator and only as influential as the participants' desire. If the facilitator is not well trained in race relations, conflict mediation, and group facilitation, the participants may not trust the process and withdraw from the discussion. In addition, if the participants are not able or willing to openly discuss issues of race, the dialogue will suffer and understanding may not occur. Participants who have been involved in or recently witnessed a traumatic racial incident may not be willing to sit down and discuss their feelings with an interracial group. Likewise, participants who distrust that dialogue will heal racial tensions may not shift in racial attitudes or interactions no matter how long or well the dialogue goes. Thus, the success of the dialogue is determined by many different factors. Several factors that have been found to be successful in interracial dialogue are described below.

Respectful Space

Learning to discuss race in an environment where students believe exploring their beliefs and ideas will be respected is critical to

students developing positive racial attitudes and interactions (Arminio & McEwen, 1996). A respectful environment helps students (1) trust peers; (2) critically examine their own biases, prejudices, and stereotypes; and (3) foster open and honest dialogue (Corvin & Wiggins, 1989; Zuniga et al., 2002). Trust is central to creating a respectful environment where students can meaningfully talk about race. Douvan and Veroff (1993) added that trust is difficult when only one or two people from a certain racial group are present:

Underrepresented groups should be represented by more than a token individual. The sine qua non of open discussion is a certain level of trust in one's safety in the group, and it is not possible for most people to feel safe if they are alone in representing a group or a position. (p. 224)

Students should believe their ideas are supported. This process may be eased if students do not feel like they have to represent their race. Researchers have not been able to pinpoint the exact ratio or proportion of diverse students likely to make participants in the dialogue feel respected. Although research on Black and White students' racial identity development indicated that, "Whites are likely to prefer heteroracial groups in which they are numerically dominant, whereas Blacks are likely to prefer groups in which there are equal numbers of Blacks and Whites" (Helms, 1990, p. 190). An effective dialogue is largely dependent on which groups are present, how many people are represented in each racial group, and whether or not the contact is positive or negative.

Fostering a respectful environment is one way to encourage positive contact among people of differing racial groups. Having White students examine how they were socialized to think about race may improve positive contact. Many White students are often socialized to think of themselves as non-racial beings (Arminio & McEwen, 1996; Helms, 1992), and this can have a negative effect on honest racial dialogues. McIntosh (1989) illustrated this in reflecting on her own educational background:

My schooling followed the pattern which Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out, "Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow 'them' to be more like 'us'." (p. 78)

Encouraging students to openly and honestly discuss their ideas about race and people of other races may also be more effectively managed in an environment that combines challenge with support. Tatum (1992) highlighted how crucial challenge is for change:

If they're [White students] able to be in environments where they're continually being pushed to look at and think about racism, and think about what they can do about it, then it's been my experience that these people start to move. They start to reach out, and not in a condescending or patronizing way, but in an authentic way. (p. 7)

The process that Tatum described can be difficult for some students who are not supported as they delve deeply into their own attitudes and beliefs (Schoem, 1993). Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) noted that after 15 years of teaching they still find it hard to guide students through the powerful emotions that discussing race elicits. Yet, if a respectful and comfortable environment can be established and sustained throughout the intervention, educators will likely see positive shifts in students' racial attitudes and interactions.

Conclusion

Interracial dialogue may positively shape students by promoting: (1) self-awareness--exploring one's own feelings and behaviors, (2) cognitive development--providing facts about other cultures, (3) attribution training--sharing different cultural explanations of behaviors, (4) behavior modification--examining various aspects of one's own culture, and (5) experiential learning--realistic simulations of other cultures (Roper, 1988).

Self-awareness involves students examining their own racial identity by uncovering how they feel and behave toward their own and other racial groups. This can take place in any classroom or co-curricular program with race as its focus. Cognitive development involves students critically analyzing readings about people of various racial and ethnic backgrounds and relating the information to their own personal experiences with different cultural groups. Examples of this could be readings in a course or book group that are sponsored by student affairs professionals in centers for students of color; women; or lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students. Attribution training involves students discussing racial issues from many different cultural perspectives and recognizing that one's racial and ethnic group membership may influence how one experiences the world. Discussion groups can take place in class as large or small-group dialogues or outside of class as part of resident assistant, student government, orientation leader training, etc. It may be critical for student leaders to have an understanding of racism, as peers are often the most influential group in reducing prejudice of students.

Behavior modification involves students developing an awareness of their social, familial, and professional interactions and analyzing whether they could be modified to include more diverse groups of people. This awareness could be developed with the assistance of faculty advisors, student work supervisors, or student group advisors. The important component is that someone asks students key

questions about with whom they interact on a daily basis and if those interactions tend to be more homogenous than heterogeneous. Finally, experiential learning involves students engaging in an interactive activity where they experience situations as someone from a different culture or ethnicity would. Examples of this could be service-learning components of a class or a student organization, such as spring break trips to impoverished areas.

The important factor in reducing prejudice, increasing positive racial attitudes, and increasing positive racial interactions is that one educator makes it a priority in their day-to-day dealings with students. The setting, whether classroom or co-curricular program, is not as crucial as having someone who is trained in facilitating interracial dialogue. That educator could be a faculty member or student affairs professional, in fact, history has proved that we need both types of educators to reach students. The question for educators to ask is: Do they believe in the culturally conservative perspective or the culturally liberal perspective of antiracism education? If educators believe antiracism education is important and should be integrated into higher education, then there is a rich, long history of others to follow: people who have found ways to tackle the complex issue of racial identity development and make positive differences in the lives of students.

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