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Anti-racism in the classroom: A primer

nwea

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The murder of George Floyd shook this nation on May 25, 2020. Why? Perhaps because it tapped into something many of us are afraid to name: what Yale University professor Jennifer Richeson calls "the mythology of racial progress."

"Despite our tragic racial history, Americans generally believe that the country has made and continues to make steady progress toward racial equality," she explains in the September 2020 issue of *The Atlantic*. Yet very little about 2020 has felt like it points to a reduction in systemic racism and its many—often fatal—consequences.

The time to act is now. "We should think of the next year or two as all the time we have, and a last chance to get it right," Dr. Richeson urges. Boston educator Casey Andrews, who authored the Teach. Learn. Grow. posts in this e-book, calls us all to consider what this work can look like in the classroom.

"[T]his moment, like many moments before it, is an opportunity," she says. "It is an opportunity to work toward changing long-held beliefs and practices, especially those that stem from colonialist, capitalist, white supremacist culture."

Read her suggestions for what you can do to start reshaping your practice.

3 ways to start building an anti-racist teaching practice

Although we've only been living with coronavirus for what seems like a short time, it has exposed even more starkly the inequities present in the United States. Already researchers have documented the extreme disparities in online learning between different types of schools: Public schools have fewer resources and less flexibility than private schools. Urban and rural schools have fewer resources and less flexibility than suburban schools. And unsurprisingly—and as usual—schools serving predominantly low-income students of color (read: public urban schools) suffer the worst outcomes.

In addition, it is impossible to ignore the horrific racial violence occurring across our nation as a new school year begins. Though the current pervasive lack of justice for and continued danger to Black people is not new, this moment, like many moments before it, is an opportunity. It is an opportunity to work toward changing long-held beliefs and practices, especially those that stem from colonialist, capitalist, white supremacist culture. We know this is all around us. The evidence, the data, is as widespread as it is compelling; a literature review by Kirsten Weir at the American Psychological Association illustrates a network of educational inequities based on race.

Supporting you

Rather than belabor the point that racism impacts education (because it does, and the proof is abundant), this post is designed as an entry point for all teachers into taking distinct anti-racist actions this school year. As Weir notes, "Research points to ways to start chipping away at bias in schools. Most of those methods have one important thing in common: More support for teachers." My goal is to offer that support to you, a fellow teacher.

This post is based on my personal development as an educator as well as my larger thinking about what shifts might be most possible for other teachers who are wrestling with how to be more actively anti-racist. (If you've read Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist*, you'll recall his clarification that *anything* and *anyone* can be racist or anti-racist at any time. He writes: "A racist is someone who is supporting a racist policy by their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea. An antiracist is someone who is supporting an antiracist policy by their actions or expressing an antiracist idea.")

I'm speaking specifically from my own position as a white-identified practitioner in a high school English classroom. I work in Boston Public Schools, a large urban district; like many schools in the district, my school serves predominantly Black and Brown students. In addition, I'm entering my ninth year of teaching, which means that some of the things I'm working on might seem difficult for a first-year teacher or simplistic for a more veteran educator. But the suggestions and strategies contained here are intended to be applicable in any school in the United States (white students need to have anti-racist teachers, too!).

Where to begin

Over the course of a few posts, I'll dig deep into some strategies I'm focusing on this school year. But first, let me suggest starting with some things that you have probably heard in other articles, videos, and social media posts. Often I find that people shy away from completing the most basic steps required for this work and want to move directly into actions they perceive as bigger or more significant. But the truth is that before you can start doing the complex, nuanced work of anti-racist teaching, you need to have a framework and core understanding of both the problem and potential solutions. Here are a few strategies that I've engaged with—and continue to engage with (this work is never done)—that are the simplest ways to get going:

Public schools have fewer resources and less flexibility than private schools. Urban and rural schools have fewer resources and less flexibility than suburban schools. And unsurprisingly—and as usual—schools serving predominantly low-income students of color (read: public urban schools) suffer the worst outcomes.

1. Read

Maybe you've read one book, maybe you've read many, but reading remains one of the easiest, lowest-stakes ways to expand your thinking without taking up anyone else's time, energy, or space. Some books you might have heard of that I highly recommend:

- *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi
- *Unapologetic* by Charlene Carruthers
- *We Want to Do More Than Survive* by Bettina Love
- *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown
- *Teaching to Transgress* by bell hooks
- If you're an English teacher, *Playing in the Dark* by Toni Morrison

2. Attend trainings

This pandemic has made it so that many excellent offerings are now available virtually and, often, asynchronously. Here are just a few to get you started:

- White Awake has excellent online courses, including "Roots deeper than whiteness," and an incredible resource collection
- EmbraceRace has a series of webinars for parents and guardians
- Race Forward has a series of trainings as well as equity toolkits
- The Office of Diversity and Outreach at the University of California, San Francisco, has a great collection of suggestions through the university and beyond

3. Do this work with your people

Do you have trusted friends or family members you could explore anti-racist teaching with? These are people you know and love, but how much do you actually understand about what they think about race and racism? How much do they know about your views? If you're already successfully having conversations, how could you deepen them? This work could take the form of informal conversations, a book group, or structured dialogue.

Ready for more?

Okay, so those are some small things. And small is a good place to start. But just reading or professional learning or talking to loved ones is not going to be enough to undo white supremacy. Those are first steps. Your second steps will require some big changes to your practice.

[B]efore you can start doing the complex, nuanced work of anti-racist teaching, you need to have a framework and core understanding of both the problem and potential solutions.

In my next few posts, I'll explore four major shifts I'm working on implementing over this school year:

1. Redesign my curriculum to be all online, user-friendly, clear, transparent, and flexible
2. Review my curriculum for evidence of white supremacy culture
3. Create space for humanity in the classroom (whether virtual, hybrid, or in person)
4. Participate in or financially support organizations creating new pathways to anti-racist change

As an educator, it's critical for me to constantly reexamine my practice and make meaningful revisions to what I do in the classroom. In particular, as a white teacher, if I am not being actively anti-racist in my planning and practice, I will perpetrate harm and violence to all students in my classroom. (The Hechinger Report has a great column on this.) This requires constant reflection and hard work. My hope is that sharing my strategies will give you ideas for how you can revisit your own classroom and practice. **TLG**

How to be an anti-racist teacher: Redesign your curriculum to improve access

The work of anti-racist teaching—just like other aspects of your practice—is never really done. It requires constant inquiry. So if you're feeling overwhelmed by the state of the world and the task before you, take a breath. Know this work feels big because it *is* big. Nine years in the classroom have taught me that while this work is never, ever finished, it is my responsibility to continue it with hope, perseverance, and humility.

In my previous post, I offered some ways to get your feet wet with anti-racist teaching: read, attend trainings, and do this work with your people. Now I'd like to explore the first of four specific shifts I'm making in my classroom this year:

1. Redesign my curriculum to be all online, user-friendly, clear, transparent, and flexible
2. Review my curriculum for evidence of white supremacy culture
3. Create space for humanity in the classroom (whether virtual, hybrid, or in person)
4. Participate in or financially support organizations creating new pathways to anti-racist change

Shift #1: Redesign my curriculum to be all online, user-friendly, clear, transparent, and flexible

It is easy to feel limited in what I can do or advocate for in service of my students, especially during this new modality of remote and hybrid teaching—one that overwhelmingly favors affluent (and predominantly white) kids. My urban, minority-white school in Boston doesn't have the resources to replicate what is happening in suburban and private schools. But despite that, last spring I saw some students who were previously disengaged by school find certain features of remote learning to be more accessible and positive for them. It made me realize that remote and hybrid learning models offer me an opportunity to serve my students in new ways that allow me to reshape practices and make them more equitable.

Lisa Delpit has a famous argument in *Other People's Children* that frames a lot of my thinking about this particular shift. (If you haven't read the book, I suggest it!) "I have found what I believe to be a connecting and complex theme: what I have come to call 'the culture of power,'" she says. Most teacher training programs and models of education revolve around the teacher being the person in power and utilizing that power however they see fit. Even now, there are many teachers around the country who would argue that students should be penalized for not attending synchronous classes, that students should find materials wherever the teacher puts them online, that students are responsible for figuring out when something is due and how to access whatever tool is required to do an assignment.

The work of anti-racist teaching—just like other aspects of your practice—is never really done.

But what Delpit's point makes clear is that the only way to undo this oppressive culture of power is both to be explicit that it exists *and* for the person in power to relinquish some of it. By making my curriculum virtual, user-friendly, and clear—by literally publishing everything we are doing with links at the beginning of the week—and by making my grading transparent and my curriculum flexible, I give up some of my power and make explicit some of the ways students can participate in their own learning process without me at the center.

While this shift initially felt like a huge project, it's become more and more obvious to me that this is a shift that will make me a better teacher overall. If coronavirus hadn't happened, it's possible that I would have still come to the conclusion that these things needed to happen (for example, I've been working on my grading system to increase transparency for the last several years). But the curriculum I'm designing now excites me in its accessibility; it brings me joy to think about the students in my classes feeling like they understand what they're doing, how to do it, and how they can succeed. Here's what I'm doing.

Go 100% online

This year, my curriculum will live entirely online using the Google Suite of products, with Google Classroom and Google Drive hosting the entirety of what I teach. This is *not* the entire suggestion. Many educators across the country will be utilizing these common online resources. To make the use of these resources equitable, it is critical to also make the changes I detail below.

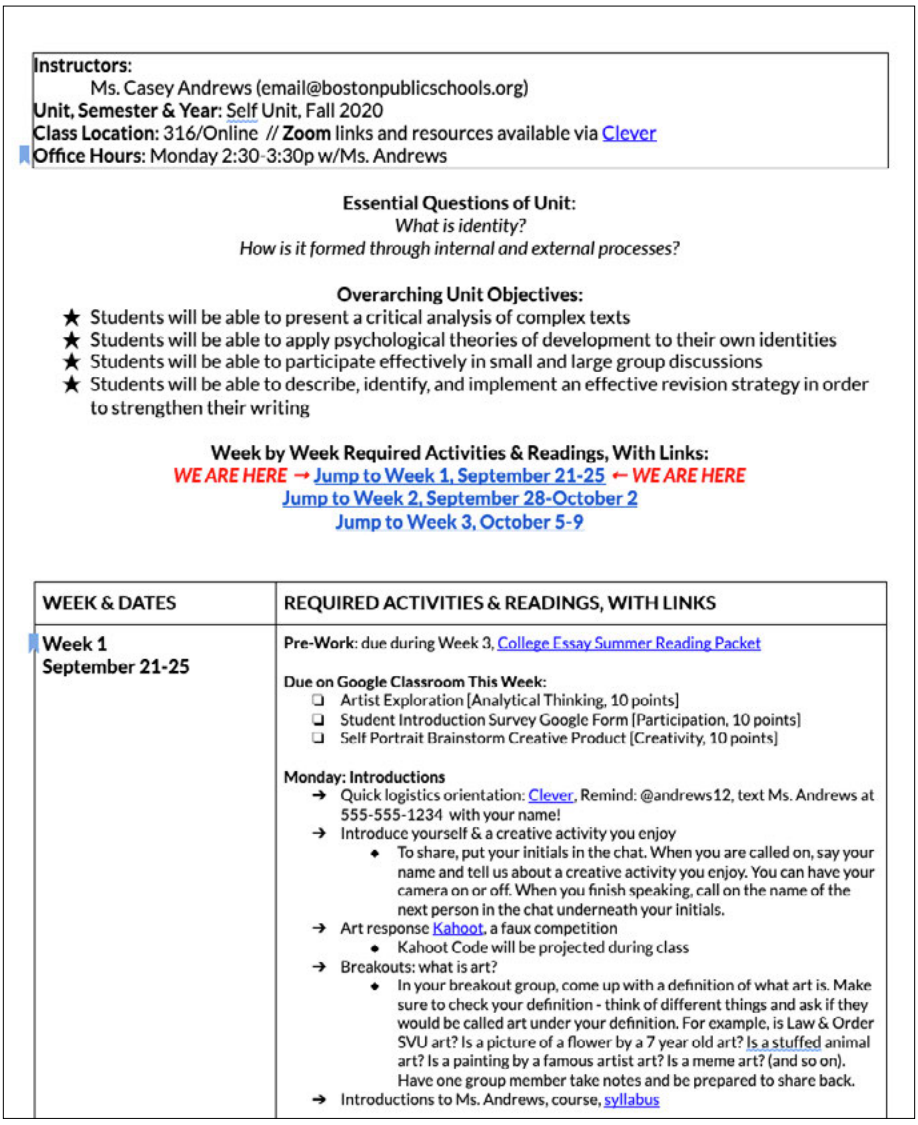
Make curriculum user-friendly and systems for interacting clear

- **Outline all of my curriculum** first in my unit plan in Google Sheets.
- **Create a unit syllabus that contains a table of week-by-week directions,** update it on a weekly basis, and pin it to the top of our Clever and Google

Classroom homepages. The syllabus will give students access to linked assignments, descriptions of what is happening in class each day, and checklists of what is due each week.

User-friendly" also means writing things out in the syllabus plan so that students who are absent can easily see what we did and what is due. I take "friendly" especially literally this year: I have to *always* act by assuming the best of my students and what they can do. This is a beautiful shift for me because it reduces the likelihood that I will operate as if my students have a deficit. In our new coronavirus world, *everyone* is living in crisis and *everyone* deserves the benefit of asynchronous, accessible ways of learning or interacting.

Here's an example of what my syllabus looked like for my first day of school.



Instructors:
Ms. Casey Andrews (email@bostonpublicschools.org)
Unit, Semester & Year: Self Unit, Fall 2020
Class Location: 316/Online // **Zoom** links and resources available via Clever
Office Hours: Monday 2:30-3:30p w/Ms. Andrews

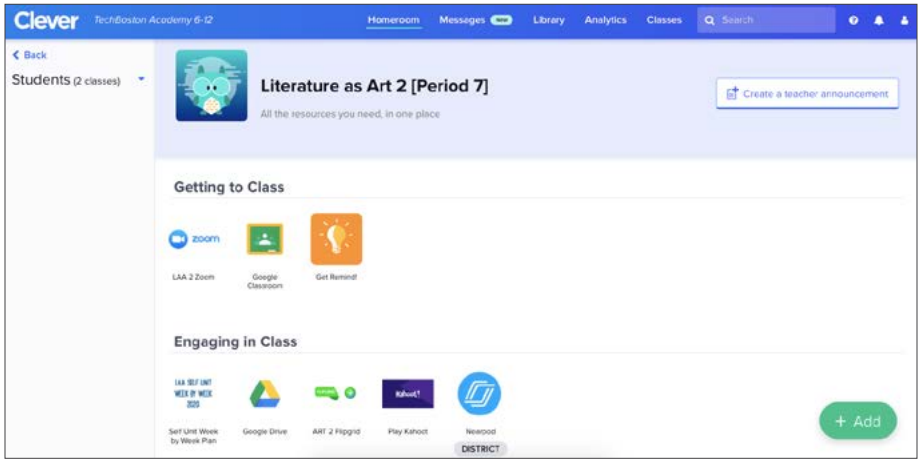
Essential Questions of Unit:
What is identity?
How is it formed through internal and external processes?

Overarching Unit Objectives:
★ Students will be able to present a critical analysis of complex texts
★ Students will be able to apply psychological theories of development to their own identities
★ Students will be able to participate effectively in small and large group discussions
★ Students will be able to describe, identify, and implement an effective revision strategy in order to strengthen their writing

Week by Week Required Activities & Readings, With Links:
WE ARE HERE → Jump to Week 1, September 21-25 *← WE ARE HERE*
Jump to Week 2, September 28-October 2
Jump to Week 3, October 5-9

WEEK & DATES	REQUIRED ACTIVITIES & READINGS, WITH LINKS
Week 1 **September 21-25**	**Pre-Work**: due during Week 3, College Essay Summer Reading Packet **Due on Google Classroom This Week:** ❑ Artist Exploration [Analytical Thinking, 10 points] ❑ Student Introduction Survey Google Form [Participation, 10 points] ❑ Self Portrait Brainstorm Creative Product [Creativity, 10 points] **Monday: Introductions** ➔ Quick logistics orientation: Clever, Remind: @andrews12, text Ms. Andrews at 555-555-1234 with your name! ➔ Introduce yourself & a creative activity you enjoy ◆ To share, put your initials in the chat. When you are called on, say your name and tell us about a creative activity you enjoy. You can have your camera on or off. When you finish speaking, call on the name of the next person in the chat underneath your initials. ➔ Art response Kahoot, a faux competition ◆ Kahoot Code will be projected during class ➔ Breakouts: what is art? ◆ In your breakout group, come up with a definition of what art is. Make sure to check your definition - think of different things and ask if they would be called art under your definition. For example, is Law & Order SVU art? Is a picture of a flower by a 7 year old art? Is a stuffed animal art? Is a painting by a famous artist art? Is a meme art? (and so on). Have one group member take notes and be prepared to share back. ➔ Introductions to Ms. Andrews, course, syllabus

- **House all links and resources in only two central locations:** Google Classroom and Clever. Whatever the technological platforms you're using, honing in on one or two places that students have to access (preferably the same ones that your colleagues use) is a key part of ensuring ease of use. Clever is used by our district and although I could replicate much of what it offers using only Google Classroom, it streamlines student log-in access to all of the apps and links we might use. Here's an example of one of my class Clever pages.



Make grading transparent

This pandemic has opened up opportunities for all of us to rethink how we assess students: standardized tests have finally come under the spotlight for the racist, ableist tools they are, and students were permitted to move on to the next grade last spring whether or not they did any work from March to June. This prompted many of us to wonder: Do we actually need grades at all?

Unfortunately, I'm still required to grade students. So the middle ground, for now, is a transparent grading system (including charts and week-by-week explanations of all graded assignments given to students electronically) that also emphasizes the kind of learning I want students to do. Making my grading both equitable and transparent is one of the most critical and intense shifts I'm working on. It requires *a lot* of planning: I need to know what I'm going to grade, why, and how I'll allow that to impact a student's overall performance in the course. I then need to figure out how to communicate that in a clear way to students without taking up all of our class time to focus on grading.

I feel resistant to this practice because, to some extent, it requires focusing more on grading, which is something I'd like to move away from (since grades typically just serve to reinforce inequity in schools). Yet by being more explicit about my

grading, I can support students in making distinct choices about what to turn in and what to revise (another important shift for me is allowing for constant revisions of major assignments).

For me, transparency in grading requires asking myself the following questions:

- Do students know—in advance—what is due and how to turn it in?
- Do students know *how* they will be graded on each assignment?
- Do students know what categories they'll be graded in?
- Do grading categories align with learning priorities? (For example, I got rid of tests and quizzes. It turns out I don't care that much about my students being good test takers; I care about trying to measure an actual kind of learning, like whether or not they can analyze a literary text.)
- When the term ends, do I think the student's grade reflects their learning? Do they agree? (I've started doing weekly student surveys to see if my grading is really linking up with how students think they did.)

Use flexible modalities

This year, more than ever, I have to be flexible about what tools I use to work with students as well as how I use them. Last spring we saw a huge shift as educators began to get comfortable texting or video chatting with students. Beyond just using my phone more frequently, though, I have to become adept at using multiple technologies. Adapting and being flexible about what kinds of modalities I use to teach is critical to supporting all students to engage in the classroom.

[T]he only way to undo this oppressive culture of power is both to be explicit that it exists and for the person in power to relinquish some of it.

A small example of how I'll approach this is to use my shortest class period (a 30-minute Wednesday block) to try out a different online technology to review or engage with material. Week 1 will be on Kahoot!, Week 2 on Flipgrid, and Week 3 on some kind of online drawing platform.

It's really important to also note that being flexible is only possible with a relative amount of consistency: I can use different technologies each Wednesday because I am housing everything on Clever and Classroom with streamlined link access via our unit plans. It's critical that I try not to overwhelm my students with new digital tools and new ways to access what they need to complete an assignment every day or every week.

Just getting started

While the work of making my curriculum accessible is huge and important, it needs to be accompanied by an intentional, exhaustive audit of all of the content to address the presence of white supremacy culture and bias. That's my Shift #2. I'll walk you through how I'm approaching that in my next post. **TLG**

How to be an anti-racist teacher: Reduce bias in your curriculum

In my previous post, I explained how I'm redesigning my curriculum this year to give more equitable access to all my students. This big shift—Shift #1 in my year-long effort to rethink my practice—calls for me to go 100% online, ensure the curriculum is user-friendly and clear, increase transparency in my grading, and make use of multiple modalities.

The natural next step is to explore exactly *what* I'm teaching. Does it reinforce white supremacist beliefs? Are there things I can do to root out bias? That's my focus for my second shift.

Shift #2: Review my curriculum for evidence of white supremacy culture

When I've talked to other teachers about revising curriculum for bias, I often encounter one of two ways that people think about this: 1. Revising for bias just means having diverse texts. 2. Revising for bias is only possible in the humanities.

While I am a strong proponent of having diverse texts (more on that below), *only* viewing diversity of texts as a means toward reducing bias can do more harm than good. Why? Because it can perpetuate stereotypes you're eager to avoid. (Ever notice how Hollywood's approach to increasing diversity usually means just adding a lone Black friend to the white lead's crew, like a prop? Or, worse yet, making another movie about slavery, as though slavery were the only thing Black Americans had ever experienced?)
And if you teach a class like chemistry or algebra or computer science, you are not exempt from thinking about diversity in texts or removing bias in your curriculum. Where did the textbook come from, for example? And how does your curriculum reflect your beliefs and biases? Do you believe multiple-choice tests are a better way to assess students than essays? *All* curriculum is subjective, biased, and influenced by the author's society.

No matter how much revision I do of my curriculum, it will *always* need more. Here are some methodologies I am using to help me revise my curriculum this year. You can try all of them or only some; there are so many moving pieces to curriculum design that even a small step is better than none.

Ask myself: What are my students reading, and how are they responding?

Ok, I know I just said having diverse texts isn't everything and that it could even be harmful. But it is still important! I used to work at a school where the English department was proud of their diverse curriculum, yet a quick audit of the texts revealed all of the texts not written by white people were written by Black authors and focused on the damaging impacts of white supremacy (e.g., slavery, class inequalities, the Civil Rights era). There were no other races represented by the curriculum, and most of the books were written by men.

If any part of your curriculum requires reading text, it's important to think about who wrote it, what's happening in the text, and what both those things mean for students. In my class, I work extremely hard to represent a range of types of texts written by different people: We read things written by older people and younger people. We read things written by queer or trans authors as well as straight, cis authors. We read work by Black and Indigenous poets, and we read literary criticism from today and literary criticism from last century. We look at memes and social media, and we watch documentaries and TV shows.

Do your own audit of your curriculum. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Who are students reading?
- When are they reading? (Gentle reminder that the Black authors shouldn't be assigned only in February.)
- How do students respond to the work?
- Is it time to replace that novel you've been teaching for 10 years?
- Do you routinely assign a book about a group of people who experience oppression that's written by a person who belongs to the oppressor group? (If the answer is yes, please cut it from your curriculum.)

Do a white supremacy culture audit

White supremacist culture is all around us. It is impossible to escape. To this end, do an audit of your teaching practice. I use a handout by Tema Okun and Dismantling Racism to guide this work. You can look at the categories generally or choose a focus, and then do some critical thinking work to unpack. Bonus points if you do this in affinity with a colleague you trust.

I chose to focus on a goal I have for this year of teaching: I want all my students to pass my class. Sounds great, right? Well, when I went through Okun's descriptions, I found a *ton* of ways that this goal could reinforce white supremacy, rather than undo it. I'll name just one for the sake of brevity: Either/Or Thinking. The binary inherent in passing versus failing tries to (and I'm

paraphrasing here) oversimplify a complex thing. Passing and failing are nuanced, shifting categories. Reasons for passing and failing can't even always be quantified or qualified or understood. Plus, my methods of passing or failing a student are inherently biased no matter what. It's important for me, then, to revise both the language of the goal as well as my approach toward it. That's what I'm working on with a group of white-identified colleagues this fall who can support me in my revision work.

No matter how much revision I do of my curriculum, it will *always* need more.

Choose at least one specific aspect of my curriculum annually to revise with the aim of reducing bias

This year, I'm working on my first unit, "Self," which culminates in students writing their college application essays. Although I really love this unit and have had great success with it in previous years, two things were really bothering me this summer: 1. Almost all of the essays we read (including "Now I Become Myself" by Parker Palmer and "River Teeth" by David James Duncan) were by white men and built on the most common psychological theories of development by dead white men (like Lev Vygotsky, Urie Bronfenbrenner, and Erik Erikson), and 2. The unit focuses heavily on reading and writing as the only modalities for successfully participating in or demonstrating learning.

To address concern #1, I'm working on diversifying the texts offered as well as thinking more about how to include newer ways of thinking about psychological

development (Bettina Love and Zaretta Hammond, for example). We'll also read more personal essays in addition to the two tried-and-true ones, which are still worthwhile and loved by students.

To address concern #2, I'm working on including a range of types of activities and moving the unit to be more of a project-based experience where students are creatively engaging in multiple modalities until they draft the essay. For example, in week two of the unit we'll engage in a multi-day analysis of relationships using an adapted version of a model from the Plan Institute. Each week, students will also do some kind of creative processing in a medium they choose. Though I had some of these elements previously, I'm using some trauma-informed, therapeutic strategies to change the ways I offer these to students and adapting to their needs as a result of coronavirus. This includes sometimes putting students in individual breakout rooms to do one-on-one check-ins; creating semi-regular whole class check-in strategies; giving surveys on what students want to see in the curriculum and activities for the week; and providing multiple ways for students to demonstrate their understanding.

Up next: Humanizing my students—and myself

In my next post, I'll talk about humanity, the reason we all got into this teaching game in the first place. Creating space for humanity can be especially challenging during distance learning, so I'll be sure to dig into some of how I'm striving to make that happen for my students this year. **TLG**

How to be an anti-racist teacher: Focus on humanity

What was it that called you to teaching? Was it a dream of being overworked and underpaid? I didn't think so. You came to this profession because you care about humanity, about the things that make each and every one of us different and the threads that connect us all.

When the going gets rough (as it certainly is right now), it can be easy to lose sight of each other's humanity. But for learning to happen, students need to be seen. It's not just about them, either; connecting to your students in genuine ways can fill your cup—that cup you knew was a part of you when you chose this career. Let's talk about how to make that happen. Building humanity is the third of the four shifts I'm focused on making in my practice this school year.

Shift #3: Create space for humanity in the classroom (whether virtual, hybrid, or in person)

I've already seen a number of posts suggesting that it's critical to create space for humanity in classrooms, yet relatively few offer practical suggestions on how to accomplish it. To make room for humanity can sometimes be a too-soft approach that doesn't address systemic racism; but at its best, the work of "mattering to one another," as scholar Bettina Love puts it in her book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, is "the work of pursuing freedom."

White supremacy makes it impossible to live in our full humanity unless we are consistently, actively fighting against our conditioning. Fighting for freedom requires, as bell hooks puts it in *Teaching to Transgress*, teaching "in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students [...] if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin." Since I know I, like all teachers in the United States, am working in a context that actively tries to keep me from respecting and caring for my own self (more on teacher burnout in this beautiful NEA interview with Doris Santoro), let alone my students, this work of teaching in the manner hooks describes is a lifelong and difficult task. And a virtual learning environment just piles more on an already hard situation.

I was recently assigned to read a useful post by Dave Stuart Jr. that details the ways educators can use video to give feedback and create classroom culture. But beyond Stuart's post, I haven't encountered much on how to make a virtual classroom into one that affirms students' humanity in the ways that scholars like Love and hooks argue is critical to their survival. With this in mind—and understanding that I, too, don't have all the answers—here are a few distinct, practical items I am building into my curriculum to make space for the human in each one of the members of my classroom community (myself included). They're centered on activities that address both the head and heart. (I am indebted to the Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center's Racial Reconciliation and Healing Project, where I trained as a faculty advisor under the wise Dennie Butler-MacKay and Abigail Ortiz and first encountered the lens of doing head/heart work as a way to move toward undoing racism.)

Design units and subsequent activities that demand critical thinking skills in combination with personal reflection

These assignments first ask students to think about the author or artist of a work. Why or how did they do something? That helps students see that individual's humanity. Self-reflection after helps them then see themselves as human, too. Why or how do they do something?

You came to this profession because you care about humanity, about the things that make each and every one of us different and the threads that connect us all.

Explicitly tell students that both their thinking and their feelings are important

Our first unit is focused on the self, for example, and I've redesigned it to be twice as long as it used to be, integrating more resources on psychology and more space for personal reflection and creative expression. As an English teacher it may be easier for me to integrate this kind of work, but I think it's possible in any curriculum at any grade level. My colleague who is a math teacher, for example, assigns a series of personal-reflection finance journals in his senior-level class, and my friend who teaches pre-K leads students in a whole unit where they discuss and talk about what makes a community.

Intentionally use appropriate check-in and grounding methods

The right methods can make sure students can participate in the classroom space without feeling distracted or cut off from their outside lives. While check-in questions aren't some kind of radical strategy, in the spring I found that using them both sparingly and with intention helped students enter into our virtual space with more ease than just jumping in. Just last week I included a Padlet virtual (and anonymous!) check-in space to start class.

Some students wrote positive things, some needed to complain or vent about school, and some commiserated about how tired they were.

Overtly teach about how oppressive systems present in our society cut us off from our full humanity

I provide multiple opportunities and modes of expression for students to express their own thoughts, feelings, and presentations with this. Here's an example to illustrate this point more clearly. A few years ago I taught a student who identified as nonbinary. This young person, whom I have a close relationship with, identified three things that were helpful to them in my classroom that allowed them to feel affirmed and safe: 1. I asked about preferred names and pronouns at the beginning of the year on my get-to-know-you survey (and checked before using with family members!). 2. I was explicit about using correct pronouns with all students as well as ensuring that students used correct pronouns with each other. 3. I included nonbinary and other LGBTQ+ authors frequently in the curriculum.

When the going gets rough (as it certainly is right now), it can be easy to lose sight of each other's humanity. But for learning to happen, students need to be seen... connecting to your students in genuine ways can fill your cup—that cup you knew was a part of you when you chose this career.

Design a teacher-student relationship that centers on individual needs, wants, and goals

I teach anywhere from 90 to 100 students a year, so I tend to bristle at suggestions like these (like the time our school mandated that we have a 10-minute one-on-one conversation with each of our students by October), but during hybrid or virtual learning, I have to make an extra effort to build real relationships with each student. A lot of the more nuanced and natural interactions of face-to-face instruction have been lost. This year, I'm focusing on building relationships by:

- **Giving specific feedback** (including via video, like Dave Stuart Jr. suggests) on assignments, especially when these assignments give me an opportunity to relate to a student's individual thinking or feelings on a subject. This means picking and choosing which assignments I give feedback on, rather than exhausting myself giving feedback on everything.

- **Texting all the time!** This was something I started in the spring and am going to be more intentional about this year. Being accessible via phone during set hours (for me, this is 7 am–5 pm) allows me to be in touch with students in the way that I'd be in touch if they could stop by my classroom on their way down the hall. Being comfortable with technology like texting can allow me to hold space for students virtually. But please let me reiterate the "set hours" piece; it's still critical for me to have my own boundaries, work/life balance, and time to myself.

- **Being intentional with language.** This is a larger project for me around using thoughtful language in lots of ways. But in aiming to make space for humanity in particular, I've been working on being more intentional with the ways I discuss students with colleagues. Especially during the pandemic, I've noticed an increase in a desire to use potentially coded or racist language—"our students," "these kids," "home situation"—to talk about what's going on for the young people attending our school. It's my goal to be both explicit and appropriate when discussing individual students, as well as supporting colleagues in not using harmful language to talk about students. (Here's a nice, informal piece on calling people "in," rather than calling them "out," in an educational context by two professors at Carleton College).

But wait. There's (just one) more.

We've covered a lot in the last few weeks: three not insignificant shifts I'm making to my teaching practice to foster an anti-racist teaching environment.

1. Redesign my curriculum to be all online, user-friendly, clear, transparent, and flexible
2. Review my curriculum for evidence of white supremacy culture
3. Create space for humanity in the classroom (whether virtual, hybrid, or in person)

If you're feeling a bit defeated, please don't. Please give yourself time to process. Give yourself space to think and feel.

In my next post, I'll wrap up this series by talking about my fourth, and final, shift:

4. Participate in or financially support organizations creating new pathways to anti-racist change **TLG**

How to be an anti-racist teacher: Support equity outside the classroom

The classroom is a powerful place to effect positive change in the world. You know that, of course, and that's why you do the work you do. But is there anything you can be doing outside of school? For me, my fourth and final shift aimed at helping me reshape my teaching practice is about exactly that.

Shift #4: Participate in or financially support organizations creating new pathways to anti-racist change

Although I saved this idea for last, to me this is one of the most critical aspects of what working to be an anti-racist educator means. In addition, I feel it is my obligation, as a white person, to be working to undo racism on a larger level than in just my own sphere.

I have often noticed, in conversations with well-intentioned white colleagues and peers, that people find it easy to engage in issues of equity in the workplace, yet ignore the personal and community work that is a truly necessary part of the whole. For example, of the over 100 adults who work as faculty or staff at my school, only a small percentage send their children to schools within our district (they choose the whiter, wealthier suburbs where most faculty live instead). This is not an indictment of these individuals but rather a critique of the larger structure of white supremacy culture, which allows white people to escape from facing the reality of racism every day. Even though many of my colleagues are deeply invested in doing equity work at our school, it can become difficult for us to see how to engage in that work on a truly personal level. That is, how do we do the work once we leave the building (or online classroom) and there is less structure—and less required of us?

For me, it feels vital to live my practice as an (always aspiring to be) anti-racist educator in my whole life, in all the communities of which I am a part. If you are looking to develop this capacity, here are a few starting points for engaging with anti-racism work outside of school. These are listed from least amount of effort required to greatest.

Donate your money

This is the easiest, least personal way of engaging and yet is critical in upending white supremacy. There are a huge number of places to support, and I strongly encourage looking for places that were created by and are led by people of color. Even small donations are helpful and sustaining (monthly) ones are

especially important. Bonus points if you donate anonymously *and* get someone else to donate, too. If you feel stuck about where to begin, here are some places I've donated to or will support in the coming year:

- Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance
- America Hates Us
- Boston GLASS
- National Bail Out

For me, it feels vital to live my practice as an (always aspiring to be) anti-racist educator in my whole life, in all the communities of which I am a part.

Participate in local initiatives

Support efforts that already exist by volunteering your time and energy. This means connecting with people in your community and finding out where help is needed, not starting your own initiative based on what you think is best. It means going beyond putting a sign in your front yard and doing work with others in your community. Mutual aid funds, community organizations doing outreach and support, educational programs, and initiatives that provide meals and organize donations are all excellent causes to find and support. Start by Googling volunteer opportunities based on your interests or searching a site like VolunteerMatch. Or connect with your local Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) chapter. They'll help you get plugged in.

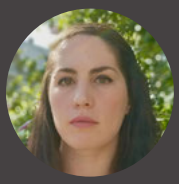
In closing

Last year, despite many of the terrifying and sad things in the world, my partner and I decided to get pregnant. We welcomed our son in June. To be honest, the world seemed to get so much darker during my pregnancy. I entered my third trimester as my school district shut down because of coronavirus. I thought back to 2019, when I'd read the introduction to adrienne maree brown's *Emergent Strategy*. In it, she describes having hope and optimism in the world. But in that moment, her vision seemed distant from me and impossible. How, I thought, could I have hope at a time like this?

Two years ago, I had the honor to create and chaperone a trip to the Equal Justice Initiative's Legacy Museum and Memorial for Peace and Justice with 11 students and three colleagues (in fact, NWEA® provided the full funding needed for us to repeat that trip in 2020. It's still on hold because of coronavirus). While on the trip, one of the most important themes in our conversations was the incredible, dazzling sacrifices that people have continued to make in the name of justice. I listened as the young people in my group committed themselves, with a serious kind of joy, to taking risks. How could I not be willing to continue to take my own?

I do not think this time is just about being hopeful (and to be clear, that's not what adrienne maree brown describes either). It is only through taking significant, challenging risks that I can hope for the world I would like to see emerge. This series of blog posts is tiny in the face of the larger risks and contributions that I expect of myself—for the sake of my own humanity, for the future of my child and the futures of my students, for the pursuit of justice and a safer, more equitable world for all. I hope it helps you in your journey to do the same. **TLG**

About the author



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