

# Towards a Community of Antiracist Praxis in Higher Education

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Transformative Principles, Practices, and  
Resources for the Classroom

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## Chapter 1

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### A Call to Action

Antiracist Praxis in Higher Education

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# 1

## A CALL TO ACTION

### Antiracist Praxis in Higher Education

Jie Y. Park and Laurie Ross

*Antiracist teaching is hard. It does not matter how long you have been doing antiracist work or how much you have studied, it is hard work. The deeper you dive, the more difficult it gets. This is not something that you can take on lightly or check a box or be done tangentially. It must be a main focus and goal of your teaching even if you do not perceive that the topics you teach are centered around racism.*

—Statement from Alena, a professor who participated in the first cohort of the antiracist praxis group

*I think white faculty spend a lot of time fretting about doing or saying the right thing in the classroom and are particularly concerned about being called out or even “canceled” (I was in this camp for a long time) and are afraid of being perceived as racist (and this fear can extend to anxiety about doing or saying the right thing in the praxis group too). The energy that is spent on managing one’s performance in the classroom – without ever really engaging in transforming one’s classroom into an antiracist learning space – is energy that can be used so much more strategically and with much better results by engaging in a praxis group, not to mention the tools, iterative and deliberate processes, peer coaching, and productive problem solving that are part of the group’s modus operandi.*

—Statement from Ellen, a professor who participated in the first cohort of the antiracist praxis group

## 2 Towards a Community of Antiracist Praxis in Higher Education

This book is about the hard work that faculty at a predominantly white institution undertook to challenge racial injustice in/through our teaching. It contains what we did in the classroom, why and how we did it, what we struggled with, and what we learned from each other and our praxis. To situate you, our readers, we begin with an origin story of the antiracist<sup>1</sup> praxis group.

### **Our Origin Story**

On July 7, 2020, a group of faculty at Clark University (many of whom contributed a chapter to this edited volume) sent a statement on antiracism to senior administration.

In the past several weeks, as mass protests have broken out in response to the continued police murders of Black<sup>2</sup> people in the U.S. and the centuries of persistent anti-Black racism across all institutions of American life, we as Clark faculty have reflected on what we can do to deepen and strengthen Clark's commitment to racial justice. We have read and learned from the Black Student Union's statement and demands. We also welcome the most recent statement from the President's Office on Clark's commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion that begins to address some of these demands, and want to lend our collective voice in support of a commitment to working together against racism at Clark.

Racism and white supremacy are structurally embedded in our society: they are deeply ingrained in our carceral systems and our financial and governing institutions. They are also alive and well in the academy itself, inhabiting syllabi, shaping interactions between faculty and students, and warping institutional practices. They are learned habits of our education and upbringing in a racist society and culture, and it is time for all non-Black faculty to unlearn them, to help our students unlearn them, and to work to build antiracist institutional structures here at Clark. We envision this happening through a number of avenues, including both program-specific and university-wide initiatives. We look forward to working with students as well as with the administration on many of these, both through faculty governance and in our classrooms.

Collectively, we are committed to prioritizing antiracism on Clark's campus. This will include antiracist pedagogical choices, like diversifying our course materials, questioning what is considered canonical knowledge and the power relations that shape this conception, and teaching the scholarship and primary texts of Black and brown scholars, writers, and makers. It will mean bringing critical race studies approaches to all that we study, rethinking not only what we teach but how we teach-what questions we ask of our sources and texts. And it will include

critical reflection on how we approach our students and our assignments – how we value and enable students’ contribution to the creation of knowledge in the classroom.

Written in response to anti-Black racism and the state-sanctioned deaths of Black people in this country, the statement went on to outline our commitment to *action* (e.g., “We commit to prioritizing antiracism in our classrooms, on our syllabi, in our curricula, and across campus”). Eighty professors signed this statement, and a smaller subset met over that summer to read, discuss, and educate ourselves about antiracism and antiracist teaching. While fruitful, the summer reading group did not feel like it was enough to help us transform our classrooms, syllabi, and pedagogy in substantive ways. That is, while we expressed a broad desire for more attention to and engagement with antiracist pedagogy, many of us were unsure exactly how to enact it in our classrooms and other university spaces (e.g., mentoring, advising, research/lab settings, etc.). The lack of preparation in antiracist pedagogy is not unique to us or our institutional context. Writing about decolonizing higher education, Hanna (2019) noted, “Very rarely are university educators trained *how* to teach [...] [B]eing knowledgeable about content does not automatically mean we will be effective educators” (emphasis in original, p. 240). Our lack of preparation in antiracist pedagogy doesn’t just reflect, but upholds white supremacy in the academy.

This book is about antiracist praxis – or the iterative cycle of “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 36). In praxis, we not only act on what we see as a problem in the world but also reflect on our action and its impact. Our emphasis on *action* is intentional as we believe that “antiracism is active by definition – the opposite of passivity, which colludes with racism” (Trepagnier, 2010, p. 104). Our emphasis on pedagogy-as-action challenges what is common in many PWIs where writing statements and creating committees are seen as forms of action (Ahmed, 2012; Brookfield, 2018). According to our university’s BIPOC students, statements and committees are instances of performativity – “actions or responses in which individuals, units, or systems [go] through the motions to tick off checklists without paying due attention to larger issues” (Warschauer et al., 2004, p. 576). Our BIPOC students demanded change in their classrooms. But faculty, especially white faculty, felt underprepared to take that on. To support this shift towards antiracist pedagogy-as-action, we (Jie and Laurie) began running the antiracist praxis group in September 2020. In the group, faculty develop a shared framework for antiracist teaching, interrogate and redesign their pedagogy, and wrestle with the complexities of its enactment. The praxis group presumes that to *live* a commitment to antiracist teaching, faculty need a structure, a set of social and intellectual practices for professional development, actionable

resources, and the support of colleagues, including their critical feedback. Central to the book is the view that a *community of praxis* enables faculty to enact antiracism in their classrooms.

### **Context, Positionality, and Participants**

#### ***Institutional Context***

Clark University is a predominantly white institution that describes itself as a small liberal arts research university. The school serves approximately 2,350 undergraduates, of which 75% identify as white. About 19% of undergraduates identify as first-generation, which the institution defines as a student with neither guardian having earned a bachelor's degree. Of the domestic BIPOC student population, Asian-American and Latine/Latinx students make up the largest demographic. The faculty are predominantly white; 73% of tenure-track faculty are white, with 15% Asian, 6% Black, and 6% Latine/Latinx. At the time of writing this chapter, one Black faculty member was at the rank of Full Professor, and between 2002 and 2021, all faculty chairs were white except for one.

In a 2017 campus climate survey, BIPOC undergraduates reported experiencing the following in their classrooms: Receiving unfair assessments or evaluations, having derogatory remarks or gestures directed at them, experiencing exclusion or marginalization, and/or being put down intellectually. Either by their professor or peers, BIPOC students reported experiencing racism most frequently in their classrooms, followed by a faculty's office. In their open responses to the survey, students noted that they did not do anything because they were used to such treatment. The themes from the 2017 campus climate survey are similar to what BIPOC students have shared with us over the years, in terms of harm they experience in the classroom – harm caused not just by the professor's pedagogy, but by the classroom climate and interactions. While we acknowledge the constraints placed upon faculty, we believe that faculty have the agency to shift their pedagogy, which includes not only what and how we teach, but how we interact with and form relationships with students. Despite the results of the climate survey, our institution did not have a program or structured space for faculty to learn about antiracist pedagogy.

#### ***Positionality***

We were able to create the antiracist praxis group in part because of our positionality on Clark's campus. In addition to being on the faculty (Jie in Education, Laurie in Sustainability and Social Justice) we are also part-time administrators. Jie directed the Center for Gender, Race, and Area Studies (CGRAS) – an intellectual hub that supports seven interdisciplinary

majors/minors, including Africana Studies, Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies, and Women's and Gender Studies. The Center's mission is to advance the study of marginalized populations through critical and liberatory epistemologies. Laurie directed the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). CETL offers programs and services to enhance the quality of education at Clark. As a "center of one", Laurie has been strategic in offering programming that centers equity and belonging in the classroom.

In addition to our administrative positions at Clark, we bring our social identities and relevant professional experiences to the antiracist praxis group. As a professor of Education and former high school teacher, Jie has belonged to and designed a number of practitioner inquiry groups for K-16 educators. In her teaching and research, she draws on critical literacy and critical pedagogy frameworks. And lastly, as a woman of color and daughter of immigrants, she has had to navigate predominantly white college campuses most of her life – first as a student and now as a faculty member and administrator. Laurie entered the academy as a practitioner, having engaged in youth work, community collaboration coordination, and community-based research for years in Worcester prior to and while becoming a full-time faculty member of community development and planning. As a white woman from a middle-class background, whose parents were both college-educated, Laurie did not face structural barriers entering higher education. Rather, she learned about navigating and building inclusive learning spaces with humility from her years of community work.

In addition to co-facilitating the praxis group meetings, we set the agenda with readings, possible discussion questions, and learning activities. As designers and facilitators, we played three primary roles. First, through shared texts and activities, we focused the participants' attention on different dimensions of antiracist teaching. Second, we worked to create a culture of learning, critical inquiry, and humility. In this role, we encouraged faculty to interrogate their assumptions and theories of practice (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994), and see themselves, their pedagogical choices, and their students with greater clarity and nuance. We drew upon specific protocols and discussion prompts, but also modeled curiosity and reflexivity in the sessions, acknowledging our own assumptions and struggles with creating antiracist classrooms. Finally, while we emphasized that we are learners – and stressed our own dilemmas – our colleagues sometimes positioned us as coaches who could offer concrete strategies or solutions. We elaborate on the design of the praxis group in Chapter 2.

### ***Participants***

For the inaugural cohort, we invited faculty who attended all or parts of the summer reading group. The reading group read and discussed James

Baldwin's "A Talk to Teachers" (1963/1998), "Pedagogy of Fear: Toward a Fanonian Theory of Safety in Race Dialogue" (Leonardo & Porter, 2020) and *Teaching to Transgress* (hooks, 2014). Our rationale was that participants in the summer reading group had already begun the work of educating ourselves about antiracism and antiracist pedagogy. We asked faculty to apply to the praxis group by submitting a letter of interest detailing any dilemmas of practice they were wrestling with and whether they've participated in professional learning communities on pedagogy. The praxis group was also open to non-tenure track faculty (lecturers, professors of practice, teaching professors) and those in contingent faculty positions (visiting assistant professors). While creating inclusivity, the different ranks and titles created an additional layer of complexity. We were fortunate to have a budget to pay faculty a stipend for their participation. We include this to acknowledge the significance of an institutional investment in order to sustain this kind of work over time. At the time of writing this chapter, we have completed the third year/cohort of the antiracist praxis group. The first cohort was made up of seven faculty across the disciplines (excluding us): Biology, education, psychology, art history, screen studies, and international development, community, and environment (an interdisciplinary unit on campus focused on international development, community planning/public policy, and environmental science).

With the exception of Jie, everyone in the first cohort identified as white. And with the exception of one non-binary faculty and one cis-male faculty, everyone else identified as a cisgender woman (Table 1.1). The second cohort was more diverse – racially and in terms of rank. But like the first cohort, there were more female-identifying participants and more faculty from the humanities and social sciences than STEM (Table 1.2).

Based on experiences in the second cohort, we decided not to accept faculty new to Clark in the third cohort. While new faculty could build meaningful relationships with like-minded colleagues, they struggled to participate fully while also navigating a new school, often in a new city. Not only did they have to learn a new department and campus, but also establish their research agenda and/or lab. The third cohort was smaller in size, with five participants (Table 1.3). Sultan, a visiting assistant professor, left during the middle of the academic year. Three out of four visiting assistant professors who have participated in the group have since left the institution. While we appreciate the opportunity to engage with them in this process (and believe that their antiracist pedagogy will contribute to their new institutions), we are reconsidering the inclusion of contingent faculty in the praxis group.

An important part of the application and selection process is the letter of interest. In reading the letters of interest, we take a learning rather than evaluative stance. That is, instead of assessing how "far along" someone is

**TABLE 1.1** Faculty participants in the first cohort

	<i>Race</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Rank/title</i>	<i>Department/disciplinary background</i>
Alena	white	F	Assistant Professor	Psychology
Ellen	white	F	Full Professor	International Development, Community, and Environment/Anthropology
Eric	white	M	Associate Professor	Education
Johanna	white	F	Associate Professor	Psychology
Kristina	white	F	Full Professor	Art History
Néva	white	F	Associate Professor	Biology
Rox	white	non-binary	Assistant Professor	Screen Studies
Sarah	white	F	Full Professor	Education

Note: With permission, we use the first names of participants.

**TABLE 1.2** Faculty participants in the second cohort

	<i>Race</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Department/disciplinary background</i>
Beth	white	F	Associate Teaching Professor	Biology
Brett	multiracial	M	Assistant Professor	Psychology
Jesse	white	F	Professor of Practice	Visual & Performing Arts – Theater
Joe	white	M	Visiting Assistant Professor	Geography
Kourtney	multiracial	F	Visiting Assistant Professor	English
Li	Asian	F	Full Professor	Computer Science
Lisa	white	F	Associate Professor	English
Nancy	white	F	Full Professor	Psychology
Nina	white	F	Associate Professor	History

TABLE 1.3 Faculty cohort in the third cohort

	<i>Race</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Department/disciplinary background</i>
Chris	white	M	Visiting Assistant Professor	Holocaust and Genocide Studies
Debbie	white	F	Full Professor	Sociology
Odile	Black	F	Associate Professor	French/Francophone Studies
Sherry	white	F	Associate Professor	Graphic Design
Tim	white	M	Full Professor	International Development, Community, and Environment

in their development as an antiracist educator, we prioritize learning about who they are as educators and their questions and goals. We are curious about the applicant's prior experiences in a learning community. What emerged from the statements is that most faculty, especially those outside of education, had never participated in a professional learning community around teaching, nor had they interrogated their teaching in systematic, formalized ways with colleagues outside of their department. Several noted that they received antiracist or DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) training, but not one dedicated to pedagogy.

In their letters of interest, faculty across the three cohorts named what they were bringing as their questions, desires, and dilemmas. For example, they questioned the distinction between content and pedagogy. Ellen in the first cohort (Chapter 4) noted that while she has been able to decenter white authors and perspectives in her syllabi, her pedagogy “might reinforce a stance in which white students encounter non-white perspectives for the first time and attempt to understand them from a default position of whiteness”. Some raised questions about facilitating difficult yet generative dialogues about race and racism in their classrooms. Kristina (Chapter 3) reflected,

It is extremely difficult to lead conversations about race, and that ideally we would *not* be practicing our skills in this area on our students [...] I am aware I have much to learn about ways to elevate the educational and dialogic experience in the classroom on these issues.

For Kristina, the praxis group was a space to learn about facilitating race dialogues in her art history classes by first participating in them with

colleagues. The letters of interest contained different degrees of self-awareness and vulnerability, referencing struggles with white supremacy in the discipline, faculty's own socialization as a white and cisgendered person, and the pain of being "called out/called in" by BIPOC students for creating harm with their microaggressions or language use. Deborah (Chapter 7) expressed a "deep and authentic commitment to doing better [... and] understand what I am doing wrong and the assumptions I am making". Faculty brought different questions, motivations, and goals to the praxis group, reflected in the different antiracist action plans they developed and implemented. But before describing the antiracist action plans, we offer our theory of antiracist pedagogy, not only derived from scholars of antiracist teaching, but developed internally by members of the praxis group over time.

### **Theorizing Antiracist Pedagogy: Our Pillars**

We designed the praxis group in such a way that we initially spent time building the "container". This included sharing who we are, what brought us to learn, and what problems of practice we were wrestling with. It also involved developing a shared understanding and language around antiracist pedagogy. To that end, we read two articles: Ada Blakeney's, 2005 publication on antiracist pedagogy and a more recent article by Kyoko Kishimoto (2018). The groups, overall, found Kishimoto's piece to be more coherent and compelling than Blakeney's in conceptualizing antiracist pedagogy. While Blakeney's piece comes out of the social sciences and addresses the preparation of K-12 educators, Kishimoto situates antiracist pedagogy in higher education and describes multiple levels of antiracist pedagogy, including institutional and community work. But several participants noted that Blakeney's piece was helpful in linking antiracist pedagogy to critical pedagogy and critical social theory.

Especially in the first cohort, with three faculty from education (Jie, Eric, and Sarah), we focused on several tenets of critical pedagogy. Theories of critical pedagogy posit that all thought (and therefore knowledge) is "mediated by power relations which are socially and historically constituted"; and relatedly, "facts can never be isolated from the domain of values" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, p. 139). Teaching and learning, therefore, are social, political, and value-laden processes (Kincheloe, 2007). Critical pedagogy is not just about rejecting views of learning and knowledge generation as neutral, but embracing an education that "openly sides in the interest of struggling for a better world" (Giroux, 2003, p. 37). In critical pedagogy classrooms, teachers and students develop more democratic and socially just ways of knowing and being in the world (Bartolomé, 2008). A final point, critical pedagogy is not just a list of strategies or activities. Critical

educators not only assume a sociopolitical orientation in their classrooms and in the world, but exercise humility and reflexivity by interrogating their positionality and relationship to knowledge.

And then from reading Kishimoto, we understood that in antiracist pedagogy, teachers and students interrogate their positionality, challenge colorblind or race-neutral modes of knowledge production, and build horizontal relationships (Kishimoto, 2018). We deeply resonated with, but also debated several ideas in Kishimoto's piece, reflecting our disciplinary training, affiliations, and social identities. For example, Kishimoto noted that antiracist teachers take their own and their students' positionality seriously as standpoints that inform what and how we know. Antiracist pedagogy's emphasis on the situatedness of knowers challenges traditional epistemologies in which knowers are disinterested and objective (Tuana, 2017). Néva, a biology professor and author of Chapter 5, noted that acknowledging the situatedness of the scientist is still controversial in the natural sciences. Nina, a history professor, wondered whether and how to hold students' positionalities and present-day worldviews when studying the past.

We also wrestled with the view of teaching as political action. This was puzzling to faculty who had not been trained in critical paradigms. How were they or their courses "political"? Over several speaking turns, we developed a shared understanding of teaching-as-political, asking each other questions about our choices around reading lists, assessments, and learning activities. Teaching is political because (1) it serves the interests of some students more than others and (2) our teaching choices are motivated by our beliefs about how young adults learn and what students need to know. Many of these beliefs, we realized, were invisible to us, let alone our students. From this discussion several faculty members decided to make their beliefs more transparent as part of their syllabus.

Our efforts to define and develop language around antiracist pedagogy led us to discussions about racism, namely discussions about moving away from understanding racism as individual and instead understanding it as systemic and structural. We also agreed that antiracism challenges discourses of multiculturalism and diversity (Ahmed, 2012). We discussed the ways in which racism is maintained by white supremacy under which "whiteness is pervasive, universal, and normal (and therefore desirable)" (Mills, 2017, p. 105). Ellen (Chapter 4) described this as the default position of whiteness, similar to the concept of the white racial frame (Feagin, 2020). While faculty communicated different degrees of nuance in their understandings of race and racism, no one in the group believed that "racism is a thing of the past". We share this last point because we want to be transparent about how the antiracist praxis group assumes a certain starting point for its participants. In other words, the praxis group is not meant for everyone, especially those who see DEI initiatives as irrelevant or even punitive.

In discussing antiracist pedagogy, the three cohorts have added different ideas – different from those foregrounded in the initial pieces by Kishimoto and Blakeney. Some ideas come from additional readings we did as a group (e.g., chapters from Brookfield’s *Teaching Race*), while others come from what we learned from our own action projects and students. Below is a list of what we developed, over time, as our guiding principles or pillars of antiracist pedagogy. While these were developed by the group, we recognize that others have also written about these ideas. Hence, we give citations where appropriate.

- (1) Antiracist teaching is about shifting the instructor and their pedagogy – content, teaching and assessment activities, classroom culture, and relationships – and not about “fixing” BIPOC students.
- (2) Antiracist educators enact authentic care (Valenzuela, 2010), or a care for each other’s well-being (not just students’ academic performance). This became glaringly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. This kind of care is distinct from “soft-caring” (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006) which is colorblind, paternalistic, and locates problems in the students.
- (3) Antiracism is active and action-oriented (Trepagnier, 2010). But taking action requires structures, scaffolds, and time – all of which enable systematic documentation and reflection by the faculty.
- (4) Learning to teach is a collective and collaborative effort (Brookfield, 2018). Educators benefit from “seeing how [other educators] work” (Brookfield, 2018, p. xvi). That is because when we encounter different, even conflicting, images of teaching, we are likely to become more aware of our own values and open to alternatives. We also benefit from a culture of care and collective accountability.
- (5) Creating antiracist classrooms is a complex, ongoing process. They cannot be created from a single intervention or activity.
- (6) Antiracist teaching is enabled by a critical inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) – a state of constant questioning and seeking new understanding about oneself, one’s classroom, and students. We asked: What, how, and for whose benefit am I teaching? How am I teaching in ways that contradict my stated pedagogical intentions and commitments to racial justice? Connected to this point, antiracist pedagogy goes beyond a collection of methods, strategies, and activities. Our praxis group was not just about providing participants with a list of strategies or activities. Instead, it was a space to wrestle with the relationship between our social vision and instruction (Gore, 2013).
- (7) Antiracist pedagogy is about revealing the “workings of power” (Tuana, 2017, p. 126), or the white racial frame in academic disciplines. While some faculty think that diversifying the content or reading list

will make their classrooms antiracist, this is a narrow understanding of antiracist pedagogy. Antiracist pedagogy is about deconstructing the view of knowledge as objective or “race neutral”. It is also about learning “how we relate to knowledge rather than simply learning the knowledge itself” (Hanna, 2019, p. 239).

- (8) Antiracist pedagogy is about building *near* “horizontal relationships” (Kishimoto, 2018). We say near horizontal because we came to recognize the fallacy in claiming that power asymmetries can be eliminated.

In presenting these principles, we decided to write them in the affirmative – that is, to affirm what *is* antiracist pedagogy instead of what it is not. We also recognize that these principles are not exhaustive – and, as Gilborn (2004) noted, evolving. These principles are evident in the action plans designed and implemented by faculty, as described in Chapters 3 to 13.

### **Antiracism in Action: Action Plans**

At the heart of this book are rich accounts of antiracism in action – or the action plans designed and implemented by faculty across disciplinary and interdisciplinary settings. Here, we offer a general overview of the action plans, categorizing them by their goal and the pedagogical practice(s) supporting that goal.

The first category of action plans **challenges and goes beyond the “white racial frame” in texts, discourses, and knowledge-generation processes**. Néva, a biology professor, guided her students to interrogate how citation practices uphold whiteness in the academy (Chapter 5). In addition to highlighting racism in the academy and disciplinary practices, her praxis project involved pushing students to reflect on how they – as students in higher education – can either uphold or challenge racism. Néva and her students generated strategies for reducing racial bias in citation practices at the systemic and individual levels, and she created an assignment in which students generated more inclusive reference lists for their research. Odile (Chapter 12) describes how she leveraged Afrofuturism as a tool to deconstruct the Eurocentric approach to the humanities, and instead, to infuse it with an Afrocentric or even Afrofuturist vision and sensibility, in the hopes to make literary studies more relevant to Black students.

The second category involves **diversifying the course content**. Jessie, a professor in the theater department, increased the representation of marginalized identities in her course on contemporary women playwrights (Chapter 11). Kristina, a professor of art history, moved away from a primary focus on white artists, instead using a diverse group of artists to

highlight “artistic agency, artists’ networks, and the power of how history is written” (Chapter 3).

In the third category, the action plans **foster greater awareness of positionality and racial identity**. The goal is not just raising students’ self-awareness. Instead, the projects in this category enable students to see themselves, and to see authors, historians, artists, and scientists as situated. Students explore how their racial identities shape their engagement with texts, ideas, and professional work (e.g., graphic design). In her literature courses, Kourtney (Chapter 8) asked students to complete an identity survey at the beginning of the semester, with the aim of “activating student identities to enhance critical analysis skills and self-reflection while removing the invisibility of whiteness”. In Sherry’s intermediate-level graphic design course (Chapter 10), students explored the impact of identity on the designer, client, and audience of visual communication. Sherry’s students reflected on and communicated their own racial identities in the form of a collaborative book. Both action plans asked students how they “relate to knowledge rather than simply learning the knowledge itself” (Hanna, 2019, p. 239).

The fourth category of action plans involves **creating more dialogic classrooms**. In these action plans, faculty utilize different participation structures and activities to facilitate more “honest”, “risky”, and “brave” conversations about race, privilege, and power. Deborah (Chapter 7) asked students to not only generate the discussion questions (instead of generating the discussion questions herself) but utilized small group discussions before reconvening as a whole class. When she joined the small group discussions, she took a listening and learning stance. Related to this, in the fifth category of action plans, faculty **de-center themselves, positioning students as active producers of knowledge**. Teaching a course on the Rwandan genocide, Christopher (Chapter 6) utilized an activity called “peer conversations” in which students are positioned as “budding experts”. In peer conversations, students, “with a partner, give a brief overview of a text, then discuss one theme, image, topic, or question that the text brings up and why it matters [...]Why does this account or element of the Rwandan story matter”? In his chapter, Christopher offers an important reminder that decentering is not just about stepping back or out – instead, it is about addressing authority in the classroom space and the persons within it. As he writes, “Self-reflexivity and thinking about power with learners are key [to decentering]”.

The last category of action plans **foregrounds access and accessibility** – Deborah (Chapter 7) used memoirs of BIPOC individuals and YouTube videos as options for readings when possible. Faculty also redesigned assessment strategies. As an alternative to writing essays, students in her sociology course could create a narrated PowerPoint presentation, and students

in Christopher’s course on the Rwandan genocide (Chapter 6) created a 10-minute podcast on a Rwandan expert. In addition to diversifying ways that students can demonstrate their understanding, faculty foregrounded access by making more explicit the expectations, conventions, and norms of academic genres and discourses. In her chapter, Kristina (Chapter 3) reflects on, with great intentionality, how she not only redesigned her art history exams, but created time at the end of every two or three classes to review a “trial” exam question, not in the spirit of teaching to the test, but to guide students to organize their understanding of historical information so that it made sense to them.

While we present these in separate categories, faculty implemented action plans that combined several different pedagogical practices – for example, several contributors write about de-centering themselves while also diversifying course content and unpacking whiteness in disciplinary practices. In line with the principles of authentic care, faculty members and their action plans also **prioritize the social, emotional, and physical well-being of BIPOC students**, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is done through intentional community-building and connecting students to one another. While Ellen (Chapter 4) explicitly highlights structuring classrooms of “radical connection”, all the chapters describe some relational practice that created a sense of belonging and inclusion.

We also want to make note of the range and variation in faculty members’ action plans, which suggest that antiracist pedagogy is not a monolithic concept or approach, but can take different forms. Antiracist pedagogy foregrounds access, diverse content, and the situatedness of learners and the teacher. It also involves interrogating dominant (i.e., race neutral or colorblind) epistemologies, especially the value placed on objective or bias-free knowledge. While different in foci, the action plans are attempts to shift the status quo of teaching and learning in higher education.

But antiracist teaching is not easy nor is the praxis group without struggles and conflict. Faculty were hindered by a lack of time, with several struggling to fully enact, document, and reflect on their action plans. Faculty were also hindered by a deeply rooted desire to be “right” or “in control”. The fear of being wrong or losing control was paralyzing for some of our colleagues. While fear, discomfort, and uncertainty can be productive – in the sense that it can generate more intense reflection and interrogation – it can also lead to paralysis and self-doubt. Finally, while most action plans created different classrooms for white and BIPOC students – classrooms that were more accessible, inclusive, and critical – this was not the case for *all* faculty who participated in the praxis group. It is important for us to honestly acknowledge that transformation is not guaranteed and that the action plans are not a silver bullet. We discuss the complexities of the praxis group in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 14.

## Organization of the Book

In this chapter, we laid out some fundamental assumptions about antiracist pedagogy and described the origin and context of the praxis group. In Chapter 2, we describe the curriculum that Jie and Laurie developed in order to guide faculty in a cycle of antiracist action, documentation, and reflection. The second chapter is replete with resources, including activities, protocols, and readings that faculty in higher education can use with their students and/or with colleagues in professional development settings.

Then, written by faculty who participated in the antiracist praxis group, Chapters 3 to 13 offer rich images of antiracist teaching, from their perspectives and in their voices. While every chapter highlights different activities, they share some similarities. Every chapter makes visible the faculty's positionality as a way to understand the *situatedness* of their action plan. It also contains an account of the faculty's action plan and their students' responses to the action plan. Finally, every chapter concludes with principles and practices that readers can apply in their own disciplinary or interdisciplinary contexts.

In Chapter 14, the last chapter, Jie and Laurie reflect on what we learned about/from creating a program like the antiracist praxis group on a predominantly white college campus. What did the antiracist praxis group teach us about the possibilities and challenges of racial justice work in higher education? What enables and hinders faculty from developing as antiracist educators? How can the praxis group serve as a model for promoting practitioner inquiry and scholarship on teaching and learning by those "on the ground"? While we suggest that there is tremendous value in a faculty group centered on antiracist teaching, we would be remiss in not addressing the challenges and limitations. Even with care and intentionality, Jie and Laurie stumbled, often feeling like we were making the road by walking it (Horton, 1990). It is especially important to share our struggles, not only because the struggles prompted reflection and deeper learning for us but because we wish to inform readers who are working to create similar structures for critical praxis.

Freire described praxis as a cycle of action and reflection, which leads to social and individual transformation. Praxis presumes that theory/knowledge informs and can lead to action. But according to Ahmed (2012), the reversal is just as important – that is, action, as a "form of practical labor" – can lead to theory/knowledge. Ultimately it is our hope that the chapters – individually and taken together – speak powerfully to the bi-directional processes of antiracist action and knowledge. As Patricia Hill Collins (2017) noted, "Paying lip service to social justice is easy" (p. 123). But antiracist teaching is hard political work that happens in the everyday through what,

how, and in whose interests we decide to teach (or not teach). It requires vision, imagination, commitment, and diligence – nurtured in community.

## Notes

- 1 Throughout the book, we use the term “antiracist” versus “anti-racist” with a hyphen. We are guided by the argument that antiracism without the hyphen emphasizes that antiracist practices are not reactions to racist systems and events. Instead, “antiracism must itself be a generative, proactive, and iterative process” (Johnston et al., 2022, p. 16).
- 2 Throughout the book, we capitalize Black, but not white. See Kailin (2002) for an explanation of our choice to capitalize Black, but not white.

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