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Exploring BIPOC Student Experiences and the Teacher’s Role in Anti-Racist Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Though there have been efforts to address racism in schools, there is a lack of anti-racist pedagogy discussion and its role in changing education and therefore changing the world. Teachers often are able to grasp an understanding of racism and how that may impact their students through professional development. There is a significant lack of action in working to dismantle the racism seen in schools, however. Racism in the classroom may look like a colonized curriculum and implicit biases that influence the way students are perceived and treated in the school. Anti-racist pedagogy works to actively join the fight against racism. This report includes two parts: researched case studies and interviews conducted by the author. The researched case studies aim to amplify BIPOC students’ experiences in the classroom to provide clarity of what educators need to work on and consider when building an anti-racism classroom. The interview study aims to learn about school staff’s perspectives in a predominately BIPOC school and gather their views on what anti-racist teaching is and what it looks like. These interviews provide insight on what educators need to work on going forward in anti-racist pedagogy.
DEDICATION

To BSU Teacher Candidates -
May you always find the power within yourself to be the change you want to see in the world and to be willing to grow outside your comfort zone.

To My Future Students -
May you always know that you have purpose, worth and value in this world and that you have the power to stand up for yourself and what you believe in. The world is better with you in it and the future is in your hands.

To Ms. Cahill –
For believing in me when I didn’t believe in myself and teaching me that I have a purpose and the power to change the world. For showing me that sometimes all students need is just a little bit of sunshine to get through the day. For making me want to become a better teacher for my students every single day. All this work I have done is a reflection of you and the teacher that you have helped me become.

To Dr. Jacquelynne Boivin, Dr. Gia Renaud, Dr. Jeanne Carey Ingle and Beth Gracia -
For encouraging me to challenge myself, fostering a love of professional development in my heart as well as providing me with guidance and models of inspiration to continue following my inner teacher voice that drove me out of my comfort zone and into a world of advocacy and educational leadership.
I am a white, Caucasian female and not an expert in the field of diversity, inclusion and anti-racism. I lack the authentic experience of racism targeted at me personally. It is important for white people to listen to Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) voices and experiences. It is also important for white people, especially teachers, to acknowledge and be mindful of how their own identity and privilege may impact those around them. I hope my work will inspire teacher candidates like myself to walk outside of their comfort zone and not only aspire to be BIPOC allies but also begin taking actions to dismantle racism in the classroom that translates to the world.

Though there have been efforts to make racial and social justice a priority in education, there is still a gap in its progress. Education and professional development for teachers often includes awareness of the racism that is happening but there may still be a lack of understanding of what educators should do to be active in this work. Teacher preparation is essential to creating a more inclusive, safe, and anti-racist world:

“It is critical for teacher education students to examine issues of racism and classism in schools with the purpose of shaping schools into more equitable institutions for marginalized students. In doing so, they must examine their own privilege, their own racial identities, and the ways in which their life experiences and worldview are shaped by these social factors” (17).

Teachers should aspire to be anti-racist educators (15) and participate in anti-bias education (15). Though this is challenging work for teachers in a society that has been built on racism, it is essential because the students that teachers stand in front of every day are the future and the society that they are building.
INTRODUCTION

Anti-racist pedagogy is a teaching practice that is used to identify and dismantle racism or the discrimination of a person based on the color of their skin (9). Some educators may believe that addressing racism in the classroom is just about providing representation of BIPOC in stories, posters and literature but it is more than that. This pedagogy challenges the racism that built society and school curriculum. Anti-racist teaching is an approach to teaching that aims to change a racist society. As a result, “teaching through an anti-racist lens means helping students understand racism’s origins and guises, past and present, so they can act to disrupt White supremacy” (23). Before educators understand and implement a pedagogy geared towards dismantling racism, one must understand what racism is and how it has shaped one’s life. Educators need to work on developing anti-racism in their own lives before teaching about anti-racism in the classroom.

Recognizing how white supremacy dominates education and the mandated curriculum is the first step in becoming an anti-racist person and educator (24). Some scholars consider antiracist pedagogy as “explicit instruction on the history and continuation of racism” (25). This pedagogy is what some may consider a risk. It moves past conformity and challenges racism in education that is seen through the colonized curriculum, only featuring white people's perspectives and leaving out violence and oppression of BIPOC. It challenges racism through discipline policies, such as suspension which is rooted from implicit biases. The pedagogy is not just about changing the literature from only featuring white authors and characters. Anti-racist pedagogy amplifies BIPOC voices and stories instead of hiding them (22).
PART 1:

BIPOC Student Experiences’ Role in Shaping an Anti-Racist Pedagogy
BIPOC Experiences: Methodology

During a literature review, case studies on BIPOC experiences in the classroom were collected to demonstrate what teachers should consider when working towards active participation in the movement of anti-racist pedagogy. The experiences collected from the literature are from Black students in grades K-12 in predominantly white schools who lived through negative classroom climates (1) and racism in the classroom. The case studies were analyzed by highlighting commonalities and categorizing them into three themes or suggestions for acting and implementing anti-racist pedagogy: decolonization, opening space, and fighting biases.
BIPOC Experiences: Findings

It is imperative for educators to amplify voices of BIPOC students when developing as anti-racist teachers. These experiences aim to guide teachers to see what changes need to happen in the classroom in order to dismantle racism, not only in the classroom but also in society. The following voices suggest that teachers may participate in anti-racist pedagogy by decolonizing the curriculum, opening space for BIPOC and identifying and fighting biases.

Decolonization

Aaliyah, a Black female was suspended in high school in 2015 for posting a snapchat picture of two white classmates during an election campaign with the caption “white supremacists” (3). She did not have the space to voice her concerns about a classmate supporting a presidential candidate who did not respect her race. She needed to create space for herself to be heard which is why she “turned to social media to express her frustrations at the oppression she experienced” (3). The school did not take the initiative to create safe spaces for students of color when discussing topics such as race and identity (3). She shares her frustration with the patterns of white history silencing black people and their experiences:

“I was fed up with the school’s lack of action at Black History Month, especially after the Trump presidency begins and like everything that was happening at the end of January, beginning of February was like the Muslim ban and all these other things. So I was angry, and so I decided on my story to do like a little spotlight thing for Black History Month every day, and so I talked about on one like different genres of Black music and like how liberating they were. I talked in one about like colorism. I talked about reverse racism as a concept that doesn’t exist ...’ (3).

Decolonizing the curriculum is one way for teachers to join the fight against racism. A colonized curriculum reflects white history every day and in every textbook. Decolonizing the curriculum is “a project to turn education away from learning according to that which has
methodological success and toward seeing methodological success merely as an unjust application of political power—specifically, “colonialism” of knowledge, epistemology, and pedagogy” (36). Educators, and the state mandated curriculum that they are required to use, does not recognize that Black history is American history. This is an example of how education is systematically racist due to this colonization.

“In mainstream American history courses, African Americans are portrayed as either victims of white oppression or as non-violent proponents of civil rights. Putting African Americans at the center of a course of study elevates Black people to actors in history who have the power to resist, the will to seek self-determination, and a multiplicity of views on the best way forward for the race” (4). Black History Month should be every day, month and year to not only celebrate BIPOC but more importantly, amplify BIPOC perspectives in a white-centered world. In decolonizing classroom curriculum, BIPOC voices would no longer be excluded from the classroom and content would be “more accurate, more inclusive, and more interculturally responsive. It is not about forcing one ideological perspective on students, it's about telling both sides of the story” (37). A colonized curriculum reflects white history every day and in every textbook.

Decolonizing the curriculum may look like making black history month, every day. Teachers also can participate in decolonization by opening space for BIPOC voices to eliminate the domination of white space.

**Opening Space for BIPOC**

When white people’s voices, opinions and ideas are dominating the discussions in a room, this is referred to as “white space.” There is limited space for BIPOC to be heard and when their voices are not given the ability to squeeze past the domination of white perspectives, this is “closing space” or cutting BIPOC out from discussions. This closure of space is an example of racism. When considering anti-racist pedagogy, educators may look to “open” space
in the classroom and in their own lives for BIPOC voices to be amplified as an action towards anti-racism (2).

White space (2) plays a particularly important role in understanding implicit biases, white supremacy culture, and racism: “While white people usually avoid black space, black people are required to navigate the white space as a condition of their existence” (2). A lack of black space (2), not just in schools but also in society such as their neighborhood or community, significantly impacts a students’ ability to feel welcomed and treated as valued members of society. This is because of the oppression, discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes that they are targeted with just because of the color of their skin. It is the everyday experiences of racism that influence the way BIPOC children see themselves.

Anonymous, 2020

“It’s the experience. It’s walking in the room being the only non-White person in one hundred and fifty people. So it’s not just about the numbers on the page, it’s about the lived experience” (13).

Unknown Black Football Student, 2014

“I play football, so you know they expect you to be good in sports. But when you are on the ASB (Associated Student Body) council, like I am, and being a school leader, have good grades and talking about going to college on an academic scholarship, then they look at you like Whoa!! I didn’t think that they (Black males) were into those kinds of things. One teacher even told me once, ‘You’re not like the rest of them.’ I didn’t ask her what she mean, but believe me, I knew what that meant” (14).

Layla, 2015

“Even if you say something, it’s very hard to ... challenge their worldview and change it. So I feel like it’s – not that it’s not worth trying, but it takes a lot of energy to do so, and [I] don’t really have that.’ (3).

Some of many ways teachers may create a space for BIPOC in the classroom are to be willing to have challenging conversations, learning to listen, becoming aware of microaggressions, and most importantly, stopping them before they start. In order to open space
instead of close space educators must: “Familiarize [themselves] with forms of microaggressions, particularly if you have limited experience with them” (31). Opening space may also look like stopping microaggressions from coming into discussion and creating relationships with BIPOC colleagues. These relationships with BIPOC colleagues can “open up the doors for you to be their ally, to use your privilege to speak up and argue against the racial and social injustice they encounter frequently both in and outside of the workplace” (30). If teachers opened space for their BIPOC students and faculty, perhaps they would not feel isolated and instead feel welcomed in a classroom community. Educators need to step back and listen to these BIPOC student experiences. This action begins dismantling white supremacy and racism by amplifying those who are not white.

Creating a space for BIPOC and decolonization means providing BIPOC students with mirrors instead of just windows; they need to see people who look like them in their classroom materials rather than just looking out a window at people who do not represent them. Kirsten Weir of the American Psychological Association would say that children learn about race through what she calls racial-ethnic socialization or “direct, explicit messages children receive about the existence of racism and the meaning of race, as well as related indirect or implicit messages” (18). Classroom bookshelves are an important aspect of racial-ethnic socialization. In fact, picture books and classroom posters often have more images of animals than those of a different race other than white (See Figure 11.1). Decolonizing literature in classrooms may look like adding mirrors for BIPOC which is a window for White students. Another way teachers can decolonize classroom routines and open space for BIPOC is having a “person of the week” who is displayed in the classroom, representing BIPOC voices such as Black women in the science field and Black men in the medical field, for example. Not only do pictures of people matter, but
also authors. Implementing texts such as poems and novels written by a person of color is representing BIPOC, as just using White authors’ texts are not truly showing that all people can be successful writers and are important to learn from.

Figure 11.1. Infographic displaying percentages of BIPOC people represented in children’s books in 2018. Of the books surveyed, there was 50% of white characters, more than all different BIPOC character percentages combined. This suggests that there is a lack of prioritization in education to create mirrors for BIPOC children (19).

Identifying and Fighting Biases

Biases also contribute to the buildup of systemic racism. Black students suffer from society’s expectations of being “troublemakers” outside and inside the classroom. Teachers sending BIPOC students to the principal's office more than their white peers is an act of systemic racism and exposes the discrimination educators may have against BIPOC. What is not often discussed or addressed prior to sending students to the office is the potential for implicit racial bias (6) to cause BIPOC students to be perceived as “more trouble” than white students (See Figure 4.1). The questions educators must ask is “What may be influencing my decision to send students to the office?” A U.S. Government Accountability Office report in 2018 showed that
“black K-12 students are 3.2 times more likely than white students to be suspended or expelled from school” (5). This data suggests that there is a consistent pattern of BIPOC students being brought to administration for suspension more than white students. The patterns further suggests that racial biases may be influencing the discussions of teachers in who is a “trouble maker” and who is not.

Nia, 2021

“I remember the tears I cried during the car rides on my way to pick up my sons, JJ and Joah – both of whom were suspended from preschool when they were just 3 and 4 years old. I still remember the feeling I got each time; it was similar to the feeling I got as a kid when my grandmother called to tell me my father was arrested again because of his drug addiction. I immediately thought back to my husband apprehensively admitting that he thought prison was a rest stop on every Black man’s journey. It was traumatic – not only for my sons who were too young to fully understand, but for me and my husband” (7).

Figure 4.1. This graphic is visually representing suspension rates for BIPOC and White students. Black students are overrepresented by 23.2% (top red bar) and even more so, 41.5% when linked to boys in school. This suggests that BIPOC boys are more likely to be suspended and discriminated against than both white boys and girls combined, underrepresented by 35.3% (8).
Racism (9) and the divide between white and black students in schools is a result of teachers and administrators not being aware of their racial biases and racist ideas (10) that create a negative classroom and school climate. These are just a few experiences of BIPOC in the classroom that display racism as a result of white people’s biases:

**Evette, 2021**

“The one time [a Black child] challenges you, all of a sudden, they become a big bad monster in the classroom, especially Black boys . . . Black boys are held to the cross. They can never do right. When they mess up one time, forever, they are labeled that way. Almost like a song on repeat, every parent reiterated this belief” (7).

**Mark, 2021**

“Some students of other color look at us, they’re afraid because of our skin color (focus-group interview)” (11).

**Mother, 2018**

“When we got home, my daughter did not say a word to me... ‘Mama, Mr. Collins [referring to the teacher – not the real name] is not happy to me’ [sic]. She then said, ‘Mr.Collins told me, ‘I am slow’ and everybody [she meant all the other students in the class] was laughing at me.’ The next day, she came home with a form asking us to sign so that the school can book an appointment with Ontario Speech Therapist because something was wrong with my daughter and they do not know what it was” (12).

Educators must identify their racial implicit biases to prevent harmful experiences like these from happening in the classroom. A few examples of what implicit bias may look like in the classroom are teachers “expect[ing] students who speak with certain accents to be poor writers” (32) and “assum[ing] that a student from a certain background will be satisfied with lower achievement levels” (32). The school staff in these recalled experiences did not show that they have an awareness of what their biases may be and how those biases are harming students. Educators can learn from these experiences by beginning to developing an awareness of biases in a few ways. Race and ethnicity bias contributes to racism in the classroom when “people assume certain characteristics about someone based on their race or ethnicity, such as assuming that all
Asian students are good at math or that all Hispanic individuals are English-language learners” (34). Once teachers are self-aware of their biases and how it may impact their students, that is not a stopping point.

Teachers need to be active in anti-racist pedagogy which involves fighting biases in the classroom to avoid creating the experiences that the BIPOC students described. Fighting biases as an educator may look like substituting thoughts or “consider[ing] whether you’d still respond the same way to a colleague if they shared your gender, racial background, age, or other characteristics. Would you respect them more or feel more confident in their abilities?” (33). This technique aims to help people rethink a situation, such as sending a child to the principal's office. While pausing to practice empathy and putting others in new shoes, this guides educators to check and see if their intentions were for any reason involving what a student may look for.

Another technique for educators to fight biases is individualization or seeing people as a human and not a group (33). This looks like pausing and ensuring that they are not expecting them to act or speak for a member of a group such as BIPOC. For instance, is a Black student tapping a pencil to be “disruptive” or is the student feeling like they need to have a break to ease anxiousness from an upcoming test? The thought of the student being “disruptive” is an implicit bias. Educators must remember that each child is an individual before they are in a group. When teachers stop and reflect on why they are thinking or acting a certain way, this contributes to anti-racist pedagogy by actively trying to challenge beliefs and perceptions that one may have. This may be difficult to think about in the moment, but fighting biases takes practice.
PART 2:

School Staff’s Role in Implementing Anti-Racist Pedagogy
**Interview Study: Introduction**

For the purpose of learning how educators implement anti-racist teaching, an interview study was conducted in fall 2021 with five school staff members who were willing to share their perspectives of working in an urban school with predominantly BIPOC students. This study contributes to the conversation of anti-racist teaching because it shows what current teachers believe are their anti-racist practices. This information helps future teachers learn about what they need to work on to build their anti-racist classroom. As a new teacher, I designed my study to hear the experiences of seasoned teachers in order to see what teacher candidates need to do when developing as anti-racist educators prior to entering the classroom.

Five staff members across grades one through eight at an urban school were interviewed to gain insight on their perspectives on racial and social justice and anti-racism in education. This school has a large Cape Verdean population and overall as a district, there are 14.4% of White students and 59.5% Black students and 19.2% Hispanic. Findings from this study may help teacher candidates see what directions and ways they need to develop in anti-racism to reach all students equitably in and out of the classroom.
Interview Study: Methods

During an internship in an urban district, qualitative data in the form of interviews with five school staff members was used to determine what teachers need to improve on when implementing anti-racist pedagogy. Data was analyzed by highlighting common themes and categorizing data into six sections:

1. Urban districts have more significant needs than suburban districts
2. Though there is work being done to address racism as a school, staff members see a need for more change to come from this new work
3. Some strategies and practices to implement anti-racism in the classroom
4. Need for hiring teachers and applicants who represent the BIPOC students served
5. Implicit biases shaping the classroom management techniques in urban schools
6. Common recommendations for white future teachers to authentically be anti-racist and culturally responsive in the classroom: practicing self-awareness and educating ourselves
Interview Study: Findings

Basic Needs

Findings from the five interviews included expressing a significant need for their mostly BIPOC, low-income students to have clothing, food and emotional support. While some students in predominately white, suburban schools have the same needs, it can be overlooked due to white families having more privilege in this country with greater disparities for BIPOC students and families. Urban districts need more attention and support due to the unequal economic opportunities enabled by systemic racism. These students experience racial inequities every day and these school personnel walk into school knowing this:

“I don’t take anything for granted. Knowing what my students go through and some of the problems that they see and deal with every day, I just don’t take a minute for granted and to always be sensitive because they always say this but you really never know what’s going on with your students. You never know what’s going on at home for them. It opens your eyes to what students have to experience and go through.”

“Not making assumptions about the students because what you may see as a behavior may be driven by what’s going on at home. Could be food insecurity- if you come to school hungry you are not going to be able to learn. A lot of students worry about where their next meal is coming from.”

“Understand the different dynamics between families and how parents and families view our role at the school (parenting at home has one style). The role of education may look different for different families.”

“Understanding where student are coming from in terms of their behaviors and the language they use and what may not look normal from my perspective may be normal for them and trying to make space for that in the school.”

Participants expressed an awareness of some struggles that students go through in this urban setting such as food insecurity, need of adult support, frustrations, and behavior as their communication tool. Though it is important for staff to understand and empathize with students,
it is more important for staff to learn how to use this knowledge as a way to actively support and fight the racism that students face every day.

**Professional Development**

Professional development plays a significant role in a staff member’s knowledge and implementation of social-emotional learning, anti-racism, and cultural awareness. The challenge, however, is that curriculum is fixed and does not include anti-racism pedagogies:

“It’s harder for teachers because of curriculum and state mandates. Teachers [need] more freedom to include queer voices, black voices and Latino voices. If we do a better job of including a broader category of persons we teach [then] we can inspire students to contribute in different fields- women, queer, black, Latino. To show kids that there's greater opportunities than they are aware of. Who from their culture has contributed to the world.”

“If I wanted to do a lesson on Haiti or Cape Verde- allowing the kids to teach us about their cultures. Sometimes I get [called out] about sticking to the pacing chart- making sure you're keeping up with standards-well it is a standard but it’s not keeping up with the districts timeline to get this done on this day like lesson tests, assignments etc. So that makes it hard to integrate things outside of our curriculum. You have to bring anti-racism into the classroom on your own time because the curriculum doesn't allow it.”

Most teachers are willing to take the time to do this work but are significantly unprepared and not confident in what needs to be done. For instance, faculty shared that they receive professional development relating to how to recognize trauma and racism but little training on “how” to address race and racism in the classroom. This suggests that school staff are inadequately prepared to become anti-racist educators. The question becomes “Why?” It seems as though there is avoidance in discussions on racism and the attempts are not seen as completely effective. One participant voiced the concern that because some professional development courses that are a requirement for the teachers are self-paced, if employees wanted to they could just click through without thoroughly and diligently reading or grasping the content of anti-racism.
To examine effective models for professional development, a study from Mount Holyoke College discusses how the length of professional development is correlated with its success:

"Unlike the “flash-and-dash” one- or two-day workshop model commonly used as in-service staff development, this course allowed for regular meetings over the course of a semester. The additional time provided an opportunity not only to raise awareness about the manifestations of racism, but also to do problem solving and action planning in response. With time between meetings to process emotionally challenging information and to test out ideas in their work settings, educators were able to internalize new ideas and begin to reconceptualize themselves as change agents in ways that briefer interventions do not allow” (29).

This school could benefit from long term professional development and community discussions similar to the program in Mount Holyoke’s study. It seems as though when teachers are reflecting on their own understanding of racism over time, more growth happens. Educators must remember that professional development is not a so called “one and done” process. Educators need to practice anti-racism and anti-racist teaching over time instead of relying on one PowerPoint to change everything. Perhaps if this urban K-8 school provided a course like Mount Holyoke's more participants would have had a greater understanding of how to teach with an anti-racist lens. A school’s staff demographics also may impact lasting change in combatting racism in schools.

**Staff Demographics and Anti-Racism**

Staff noticed that employment demographics play a role in contributing to racism in their school and the field of education as a whole:

“Student body is 90% students of color and we have faculty that is like 90% Caucasian. Is that the fault of the person who is doing the hiring or are we not getting candidates in? We want staff to represent our students but if nobody is applying for that role then what do we do? I honestly believe it is predominately white persons who apply. I think this comes from needing a masters to do it which means there's greater economic opportunity. As an industry we can do a better job of subsidizing those costs for persons
of color to get them more involved in it and creating more economic opportunity, so we have a more diverse field.”

“The teachers here are primarily one race (white) and ethnicity and background and that doesn't mean we should be firing teachers and hiring new ones, but I think that is a huge thing and component in diversity and inclusion. The ability to feel what they feel is not there unless you actually can [and can’t as a white educator].”

“Our school is trying and the culture of the district [is] stuck in a way and I think it will take a long time for them to promote more cultural and racially equality.”

Staff expressed that the school is only in the “beginning stages” of prioritizing anti-racism. Participants’ choice to emphasize that change is happening, but very slowly, suggests that perhaps there is some resistance to change. With less resistance, the faster and more efficiently anti-racist pedagogy could be achieved. Room for improvement as a school includes hiring staff to represent the students served, as much of the staff is white. Schools need to "acknowledge that the majority of the U.S. teaching force, from K-12 to teacher education in institutions of higher education, are white middle-class females...Unwillingness to do so maintains the recycled nature of the hegemonic whiteness that dominates the field of education” (26). White teachers "must acknowledge the implications of the overwhelming presence of whiteness indicative of the majority of urban schoolteachers” (27). With greater consideration to open space for staff who identify as BIPOC, this closes that white space and therefore, opens opportunities for growth and collaboration with various voices that can work as a team.

**Anti-Racism: What is it to Teachers?**

Staff members say anti-racism work is a priority. One interviewee stated, “If they don’t feel valued or that they can’t come to you to talk about their families and their cultures then what kind of teacher are you. What are you doing? Why do you come to work every day? What are you doing this for if it's not for the kids? In the classroom you are part of your classroom. Your
personality and your belief system of what you promote and teach the kids that is your teaching.”

When asked their definition of anti-racist teaching, the five staff members shared the following:

“Teaching knowing that you don’t have a bias and I feel like it’s just making sure that you are meeting the needs of all of your students no matter what that looks like for your students.”

“It’s being authentically yourself and promoting authenticity in the students. Allowing students to be themselves.”

“Making sure everyone is treated respectfully and keeping the slurs out. You want to allow the languages at home but the disrespect still can’t happen.”

“Promote kindness and just know that these kids are so young. People are people and we need to treat people like people and there’s no difference.”

School staff believe that it is the teachers’ responsibility to integrate anti-racism into their lessons wherever at all possible. This task is time consuming on top of their other daily responsibilities but it is a need and priority by staff despite a lack of professional development. Some strategies and anti-racism practices in the classroom, according to participants, are the following:

“I’m open to stuff on the news in letting the kids talk about what they want to talk about and celebrate all these different holidays and hear from them because that’s where we are going to learn. We’re going to learn from their experiences, we are not going to learn from adults who tell us how they felt 20 years ago. We’re going to learn from the kids in front of us right now and I’m really sensitive to that and really open to that.”

“I try to put together lesson plans along with the social emotional teacher that promote diversity and inclusion and teach student show race affects others. Because our student body is reflective of other cultures, we need to learn from them because they experience implicit and explicit racism on a daily basis whether or not they’re even aware of it at this age. It’s up to us to try and help students recognize it and as a staff how we can help combat it.”

“A lot of it comes down to the anti-bullying program and a lot of it is reflecting on the language that we use with others. If a student is bullying another kid- they have to do reflective worksheets to see how actions and language impact that student but also student body as a whole.”
“At home students may use certain wordings or be acceptable with the way non formal English is and allowing that to be in the classroom when they're having conversations. Like “cause.” As long as they know when writing it that the word is “because” like allowing some of those things in the classroom- becoming more accepting of these things.”

“They keep telling you that relationships help with classroom management but it’s not just behavior management- it helps you get to know what you are not familiar with because you didn’t grow up in urban with their cultures [and with their families’ expectations].”

“When I say build relationships with kids and have conversations with them and talk to them it’s not just for behavior management -it’s so you can learn about them as individuals and get used to them. So that one kid that has a little twang to [their] speech that isn’t always talking in proper English you know it’s not because he doesn't have the knowledge it’s because that’s how his family speaks- that’s what his entire culture is- relationship is more than behavior.”

“Because I teach history and social studies, I have more opportunities. I teach ancient civilizations so I can teach different cultures, but we also get into conversations of racial and social justice because of the content matter and its really cool to get different sides of the stories and see how the kids feel and their unique perspective even as seventh graders. There’s always room for improvement.”

Participants see anti-racism in the classroom as prioritizing what is in the news as it relates to their students’ experiences and facilitating open discussions about the news as a way to validate students’ feelings and observations about the world they are growing up in. Interviewees also see anti-racism as building relationships with their students to learn about them, not to benefit classroom management but to value each human in the classroom as who they are.

“Anti-Racist Teaching”

When teaching is enveloped in anti-racism, teachers are expected to “address power dynamics and equity and brings awareness to prejudice while promoting respect for and value of
differences. This type of instruction falls under social justice education, which centers around developing a social awareness of inequities along with a critical lens that encourages social action” (28). Although only two out of the five staff members have heard of the term “anti-racist teaching” all try to implement diversity, inclusion, equity, and anti-racism in their classroom in their own way despite limited training and priority from the school:

“Newer curriculum programs have diverse characters and able bodies. Older programs like Reading programs have a lot of animals. So I like to supplement those lessons with my own books and own things I found and created to meet curriculum.”

“Reading stories where they can see different cultures and relate to different things. We say that books are like windows to outside and all kids should also look into the books and see a mirror and see themselves.”

“Books are huge- that’s where they can relate that’s where they can see and maybe I don't know their experiences but maybe I have a book that can help them and we can have a conversation about those kinds of things.”

There is a new Diversity and Equity Committee at their school that aims to help staff members understand their students’ culture and represent change in classrooms. Although, this committee is lead by teachers and school staff. This suggests that teacher conversations are more powerful than administrative ones. Though there is work being done to address racism as a school, staff members see a need for change to come from the curriculum to support anti-racism in the classroom. This suggests that anti-racist pedagogy is difficult to implement in schools. Administrators and state mandators of schools and curriculum need to place more emphasis on anti-racism and help move school districts away from toxic cycles of systemic racism in the discipline of education.

**Classroom Management**
Classroom management is particularly important to discuss when thinking about anti-racist teaching, especially when discussing the difference between urban districts and suburban schools. According to all five participants, BIPOC students in urban schools need more assertive direction than white students in suburban areas. Students experience countless hardships such as food insecurity, worries of where their meals come from, domestic hardships and the never-ending cycle of racism and oppression. It was explained that these students sometimes need to be spoken to more harshly because this is how their adults speak to them at home and will typically not follow directions quickly and effectively otherwise.

“I try and be super nice and sensitive but sometimes these students really respond to a little bit more of a firm hand. Sometimes you need to stand up there and say you need to listen to me right now and here’s why, a, b, c, d because that’s how they respond. These students when they go home that’s how their elders speak to them and that’s what gets them listening and focused, so I do call backs and all those fun things. I do marbles - put one in and out, tickets, prizes but sometimes you just need to say you need to be quiet so I can teach you and this is why and they are more receptive to that than anything else unless I shake the jar of marbles. If I was in suburban district, I would be more hesitant to be firm.”

“I think in a more white school you have less problems. Here you have so many students from different part of the world that classroom management can be very difficult for teachers because some of the students come to school so angry because they are missing something at home. The education at home is not the same. A lot of times Cape Verdean students families work and they are home alone so basically they have anger issues when they come here it is very hard for them to control themselves.”

“In predominantly white districts it is a totally different world- [students don’t] need the same type of comfort and safety things at home. They don’t have the same traumas as these kids do here. I could never teach the same way here than in suburban because of these kids’ social emotional needs- their basic needs aren't always met. If you don’t meet those first then you can’t meet them academically.”

“You have to use different strategies. Here they are accumulated to tougher love then sometimes when you try and use a gentle approach that other kids don’t require it doesn't work for them. They don’t listen or follow directions to “come on buddy you got this”
Saying “enough is enough sit down and get it done” they are like okay and they get it done. Those are different needs that kids here need to learn compared to suburban classes.”

“A lot of teachers tend to use their voice loud and disciplinary, but I’ve learned and its different for each person like that’s the problem. Each [teacher] has a skill they’re good at for classroom management. My opinion is if you can get kids to respect you then they are going to listen to you. I try to teach them that I’m the adult and they are the kids that I have to give them respect to earn their respect.”

After administering the interview and gathering staff members’ insights on classroom management in a predominately BIPOC school, there are more questions to be asked in future studies such as “how do you know being more assertive is the most effective strategy for these students?” The responses to what classroom management looks like in a predominantly BIPOC classroom suggest that there is an inherent assumption that students are spoken to harshly at home and that it is the correct way to speak to them at school as well. Though this may be true for some students, these responses reflect staff members’ racial unconscious bias, or the “learned beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes about a particular race that results in harmful or preferential treatment of members of that race” (20). Most of these staff members have likely not visited their students’ homes to understand how students are treated and what directional style “works for them.”

The interview study shed light on racism which “looks different from the racism of fifty years ago. We don’t always recognize it” (20). This study teaches us that educators’ identities and minds may influence them to speak in an assertive way in the classroom because that is what they believe is the best possible direction for students experiencing oppression. We must steer away from these racial unconscious biases, like assuming students need to be spoken to harshly because this is what teachers perceive they may be used to at home. Instead, we can
educate ourselves on how to reach and support all students without differentiating between how BIPOC students should be talked to compared to white students.

**Participants’ Recommendations for White Future Teachers**

Common recommendations for white future teachers to authentically be anti-racist and culturally responsive in the classroom include practicing self-awareness and educating ourselves. This means identifying biases, asking “Why?” when one begins to feel defensive, being open to learning and to being okay with being uncomfortable.

“If you don’t have those experiences it’s not your fault, I mean, you can’t control that, so I would just say educate yourself and be honest. Say you know what, this is my background, I’m not really sure but I want to have a conversation about it and I’m open to learning and that is totally okay.”

Teachers can listen to podcasts, read books, work and talk with other educators who do not look like us and engage in professional development opportunities. Educators must diversify our classroom literature, provide opportunities for students to speak about current events and to open the class for students to teach us about their cultures and learn with them.

“Before you judge any student get to know them first see what's going on at home before you make any decisions.”

“To be honest as a white woman when a black man is walking behind me on the street, I’m walking faster or crossing the street to walk on the other side, but it could be one of my students’ fathers who is a gentle giant and just the sweetest guy. I had to be more aware of situations like that, to pull those things out of myself really do matter. If in the mall and there is a black man getting a little close but then you may have a second and then you're like “Oh hey I had your kid last year, it’s so nice to see you” - you have to learn to adjust to it and be aware of it.”

“Don’t be something you’re not - the kids see right through it. When you're talking to them about their culture and about their race instead of explaining the things you might know let them talk- let them explain what their culture is like and learn from it and then show you learned from it- bring it up and talk about it and that builds that relationship.”
They will fall in love with you because they're like, “This teacher who gives a crap about me.” and that's huge.”

“Don't knock yourself out over it and understand that you're going to make mistakes you're not going to get everything right and don’t be performatively apologetic because then it just becomes about yourself and you're letting yourself off the hook for not changing your behavior at that point. Acknowledge that you made a mistake and move on.”

“So many people that can guide you in this town. Now we have a diversity and equity [committee] that can help you. There is always stuff out there to do like cultural things to prepare you for the classroom.”

Participants were honest and shared that there are challenges to anti-racist pedagogy such as overcoming the fear of making mistakes and asking for help. Staff members acknowledged that the process of becoming an anti-racist educator is not easy but essential and requires mindfulness. Educators make mistakes but what is most important is what you learn and how you move forward afterwards.

**Interview Study: Discussion**

Only two out of five staff members knew about “anti-racist teaching” suggesting that there is a lack of confidence and understanding of what anti-racist teaching is. Though there is a Diversity and Equity Committee at the school, some staff do not have anti-racist pedagogy on their mind. They do, however, have an understanding of cultural responsiveness. Anti-racist pedagogy is challenging racism whereas culturally responsiveness is just recognizing the importance of a students' culture (35).

This school and the staff are progressing in a positive way towards understanding and representing their BIPOC students. However, anti-racism still seems to be under the surface and not quite implemented yet. There is still countless work to be done for schools to successfully engage in anti-racist pedagogy. This concept may appear new to some teachers and will take
practice and dedication to implement. Over time, educators, especially white educators need to engage in this work to improve themselves. This is a responsibility and obligation for teachers, as one’s identity impacts their students: "White teachers must “check” themselves before they wreck themselves and our urban students of color” (27) with their white fragility that harms those around them. White teachers should seek to understand that they may be “consciously or subconsciously aware of what it means to be White or whether... [they] can understand how being White intimately impacts how people of color experience their racialized lives" (27). White educators must take action upon themselves to evaluate their identity, ensuring that they are not closing space and be willing to authentically participate in this movement with action.

This interview study is helpful for future teachers to know that currently anti-racist work for teachers seems to be more of a self-directed interest and new concept than required or fully implemented pedagogy. This suggests that teacher candidates can participate in the anti-racist education movement by being advocates to prioritize this work. These interviews suggest that being equitable in schools is not just about understanding oneself and their students but building a structure of anti-racism in the school curriculum and classroom environments. This begins with self-awareness of how a teachers’ identity may impact their students first. Then, speaking up for this change in education and pursuing actions. Teachers who are new in this work must remember that awareness is not activism. True allies are active participants in the progressive movement to prioritize and implement anti-racist pedagogy. This may be difficult for some teachers, but it is essential and teachers must never give up: “while participants were energized by their new learning, they also expressed anxiety about becoming isolated in their schools as lone antiracist voices. This feeling is well-founded and is common to those embarking on an
antiracist journey. Maintaining one’s momentum as an antiracist educator without support and opportunities for continued growth is difficult” (29).

Conclusion

Anti-racist pedagogy is a practice that educators can use to dismantle racism in the classroom and influence an anti-racist society. BIPOC voices and experiences are critical to understanding what actions need to be taken in education to work for anti-racism. Decolonizing the curriculum, and history content in particular, is one suggestion to engage in anti-racist pedagogy which aims to dismantle racism and white supremacy through content. Isolation is a common feeling that BIPOC students have when schools and classrooms do not open space for BIPOC voices. To pursue anti-racist pedagogy, teachers need to open discussions and listen for a change instead of allowing white voices to dominate the classroom just like in society. Racism in the classroom will not disappear unless educators fight the implicit biases within themselves first. To implement anti-racist pedagogy, educators need to constantly work on identifying what their biases may be and how to stop them from interfering with how they treat students. These actions are only a few out of many ways that educators can do their part in fighting against racism. Educators must have humility, knowing that growth in anti-racism in oneself and anti-racist pedagogy as a teacher takes time. Without teachers actively working to fight racist practices in the classroom with anti-racist pedagogy, progress will not be made. Awareness is not action. The more teachers work toward decolonizing curriculum and fighting their implicit biases, the brighter the future will be. As a future teacher myself, I plan to apply these lessons to investigate my own implicit biases and enact an anti-racist pedagogy in my classroom, hopefully becoming part of the movement towards decolonizing the curriculum and opening more space for BIPOC.
REFERENCE KEY


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