Editors' Notes

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Editors' Notes

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Welcome to the special issue of the Mid-Western Educational Researcher on the topic of Anti-Racist Education. Calls for increased culturally responsive and justice-oriented practices in education are not new; however, challenges and opportunities for anti-racist education in U.S. P-20 education continue. Anti-racist work is always work-in-progress rather than an achievable destination, and there will always be a need for anti-racist work to be systemic in order to dismantle the harmful status quo.

This special issue was guest edited by Kate Brodeur, Starr E. Keyes, and Kristine N. LaVenia of Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio.

From the Editors

Despite more public conversations about race and anti-racism across the United States in recent years, discussions within educational spaces, especially within our Midwest region, remain limited and carefully monitored. Educators face increased pressure from parents, school boards, university administrators, and legislators to omit explicit discussion of race, racism, and anti-racism from their practice. In the face of this increasingly challenging educational landscape, focus on intentional anti-racist practices remains essential for building just spaces for learning.

Anti-Racist educators must be willing to talk about race with their students and acknowledge the reality and harm of racism and White supremacy ideology (Simmons, 2019). However, racist policies and practices are so deeply rooted in the American education system that they may be difficult to recognize. Condon and Young (2017) named this challenge, stating “the racism that is closest to us, that we unknowingly and without intention participate in is most difficult to perceive and resist” (p. 4). Dismantling long-held, institutional practices requires commitment to both individual and collective action (Singh, 2019). We believe educators can and should share this purpose at all levels.

The call for proposals for this special issue concentrated on implementation of anti-racist practices and pedagogies across PK-20 settings. The resulting papers include both empirical research and commentaries addressing educational contexts from preschool to post-secondary. In this issue, readers are asked to disrupt both personal beliefs and institutional practices where they may be harmful and, at the same time, are offered new frameworks for instruction and new ways to envision success.

Papers are organized in two sections: one group that paints images of what anti-racist educational contexts can and could look like; a second group that offers tools for educators and teacher educators to develop anti-racist curricula and practices.
Contexts for Success

Authors Infini Jemison-Ewing and Marlon I. Cummings push back against deficit-orientations about students in their research titled “Conversations about Academic Success: Developing Supportive Context for High Achieving Black Students.” Jemison-Ewing and Cummings present a study that celebrates the voices of academically successful Black high school students to highlight the importance of institutional supports such as school counselors and personal sources of resilience.

Whereas Jemison-Ewing and Cummings focus on high school students, researchers Nicole R. Rivera and Jennifer K. Shah focus on higher education spaces with their study “Be Loud Behind Me, Show Me That You Care: Conducting Campus Climate Focus Groups with Undergraduates at a Predominantly White Institution.” University student participants representing a variety of marginalized identities share the complex ways they navigate their predominantly White institution and provide recommendations to make institutions like theirs more inclusive. Similar to the findings in the previous article, Rivera and Shah note the importance of the institution (e.g., professors, affinity groups, and campus offices) in enhancing a sense of belonging and inclusivity.

Linsay DeMartino offers a framework for disrupting whiteness deeply embedded in educational spaces in her commentary “Transforming Educators: A Framework for Developing Accomplices for Racial Justice in PreK-12 Schools.” Through exploring the existing role of white privilege, emotionality and shame in education, DeMartino provides concrete ways that educators can enact critical caring, love, and hope for authentic change in learning environments. The author reminds us that this work must not be performative, but sustainable, equitable, and embedded throughout the institution (PK-12 and higher education). While these authors briefly discuss the harm that is caused when institutions are racist and inequitable, they also provide information regarding supportive and inclusive contexts.

Curricular Supports

The next three articles in this special issue delve into anti-racist contexts and suggest some ways that educators and teacher educators can foster more inclusive, socially just, anti-racist classrooms. Kerry-Ann Escayg and Terry Husband offer a framework for early childhood educators to disrupt traditional, colorblind curricula in “Safe and Sound”: Anti-Racist Curriculum Models for the Early Years Classroom.” Escayg and Husband offer six goals to developing positive racial identities and critical consciousness amongst the youngest learners. The authors provide a rationale for why we must discuss race and racism with children in early childhood classrooms, and how in so doing, we help dismantle White supremacy and promote racial justice and racial pride.

While it is vital to introduce anti-racist practices in early childhood, it should not stop there. In Jennifer Banas and Sarah Gershon’s study “A Novel Approach to Social Justice Education,” the authors report social justice learning outcomes from infusing discussions of young adult novels in high school health education classes. Further, Banas and Gershon provide resources for other educators to implement biblioguidance in their teaching.
Finally, Leanne Kang offers an insightful commentary that pushes narrow conceptions of anti-racist education, from how Asian American history tends to be absent in K-12 and university educator preparation programs, to how she incorporates Asian American history in one of her university courses. In “Why Anti-Racist Education Must Include Asian American History,” Kang takes a historical approach, presenting key moments in Asian American history to illustrate how this history intersects with other civil rights movements and how it should inform the preparation of future teachers.

The authors whose work is featured in this special issue have provided both theoretical analyses and grounded teaching practices to support other educators in the ongoing work of developing anti-racist pedagogies and practices. All this work is necessary to dismantle institutional racism in the PK-20 education system and create a more equitable and inclusive society. It is only through challenging one another to engage in critical reflection, analysis, and action that we can collectively work towards just and equitable learning experiences for all students.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this special issue. We are grateful for this opportunity and collaborative effort to showcase how educators and teacher educators are implementing anti-racist practices and supportive contexts for all students. It has been an honor to serve as guest editors, and we hope that this special issue provides practical information to allow you to be a catalyst for change at your institution.

Kate Brodeur, Starr E. Keyes, and Kristina N. LaVenia, Guest Editors
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