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# Guest editorial: Racial justice reform must start in schools of education

Guest editorial

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*Young, gifted and Black*

*Oh what a lovely precious dream*

*To be young, gifted and Black*

*Open your heart to what I mean*

*In the whole world you know*

*There's a million boys and girls*

*Who are young, gifted and Black*

*And that's a fact!*

(To Be Young, Gifted and Black Lyrics, 2022)

The brutal killing of unarmed George Floyd by the Minnesota police has caused an international uproar, calling politicians to take the matter very seriously. In response to the public indignation, leaders of different services and businesses, including educational institutions, have adopted different measures to show their commitment to denouncing racist practices. These measures include the creation of webpages that feature anti-racist statements, support for diversity, equity, and inclusion and invitations of experts on issues of racism to lead anti-racism conversations. These approaches, however, have been criticized by anti-racism activists (Peprah, 2020, June 30; Deggans, 2020, Aug. 25) as not being enough unless they are accompanied by tangible actions. To show anti-racist proactiveness, for example, schools of education would have to demonstrate commitment and willingness to move away from the status quo curriculum, i.e. a curriculum that promulgates Eurocentric values when the US population is diverse, and its make-up is predicted to shift to majority minority by 2050 (Kotkin, 2010; US Census, 2018). Advocates of multicultural education (Ladson-Billings, 2004), culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) have long called on schools of education to reform the curriculum to ensure that it represents all children's cultural experiences. However, the plea seems to have received little to no attention. The prevailing curriculum, rooted in coloniality, has alienated many children from racial minority households, making learning meaningless and school completion a challenge. Many children from minoritized communities do not get to either go to or complete college, hence reducing their chances to achieve social mobility. This is particularly true for black males. Yet, we wonder why many black children, both male and female, drop out of school to find themselves on the streets, behind bars or dead (Howard, 2013; Tatum, 2009). How can schools of education act as a preventive institution? Teacher education programs *can* and *have* an obligation to choose to be on the right side of history and provide its teacher candidates with knowledge, passion and a moral compass which are pre-requisites for inclusive teaching. Schools of education ought to take a bold stance toward endorsing the



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work of minority scholars and their allies in their advocacy for culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Conscious of the overdue reform in teacher education and its detrimental impact on the lives of black youths, especially males, the editors of this special issue have taken the initiative to bring together voices and advocates for race awareness in teacher preparation programs.

The issue is comprised of papers that address the critical need for the long overdue reform in teacher education to ensure that all educators of black and brown children are exposed to the knowledge and equipped with the tools and skill sets they need to disrupt the school-to-jail pipeline for black and brown children. The editors and contributors to this publication prove the existence of transformative educators who take seriously the initiative and responsibility to adjust the curriculum to include the much-needed conversation on the need to counter anti-BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) racism.

### **Article summaries**

The authors of the eight articles included in this issue demonstrate their determination to implement a life-saving curriculum through their commitment to: confront legacies of coloniality in teacher education, prepare educators who save lives, inspire and guide teachers to be humanitarians first, counter antiblack racism in world language teacher preparation, go beyond anti-racist pedagogical practices by co-constructing a pro-black classroom, mandate racial literacy as a prerequisite for teaching racially dignifying content, prepare anti-racist educators through transformative teacher education and create a R.E.F. O.R.M. Café space where conversation translates into action. The chapters give clear understandings of the actions required to take to save black lives through the implementation of actionable curricula that have a specific focus and can be implemented readily through schools of education.

Within the first article, “Wrestling with Racism and Anti-Blackness- Confronting Legacies of Coloniality in Teacher Education Programs,” CarolAnn Daniel stresses the need for an alignment between teacher education programs and the teachers who will teach diverse racial and ethnic students. Colonial practices and a historical agenda that allow for the continuation of accepting the status quo, and defending white supremacy, continue to provide for racial domination, and skewed educational mindsets and practices. The emphasis of this article is to understand how Western epistemic perspectives maintain and perpetuate inequities, hierarchies, racialization and the strongly felt nature of those structures that dominate the teaching, learning and academic outcomes of black students. Teacher educators and teacher candidates have the power to play the most important role in “disrupting the logics of coloniality,” and the ability to create inroads into epistemological shifts that humanize the education of black students.

The article by Immaculee Harushimana, “Preparing Educators Who Save Lives: What Can US Schools of Education Do,” shares the author’s lived experiences as a black woman and professor working with teacher candidates who are radically different from her racially, ethnically and nationally. Harushimana points to the methodologies that help to illustrate the urgency of these situations and the necessity to secure the worthiness and respect of black students and faculty. What is emphasized are the steps and strategies needed to employ the appropriate, strong and sometimes risky means to move the preservation of black lives forward in schools of education throughout the USA.

In the next contribution, “Teachers Should Be Humanitarians First,” Phyllis Bivins-Hudson draws upon her 40-year experience and expertise in leadership and education to provide anecdotes from her classroom and her child’s school encounters to illustrate

inequities and inequalities hurled upon black and brown children. Emphasis is placed on the need to delve deeply into understanding the complex layers that complicate children's lives, including childhood trauma, lack of empathy, poverty, mental health and a host of biases. Bivins-Hudson insists that teachers must be humanitarians first, i.e. before considering the teaching profession. Being flexible, reaching the heart of each child, understanding students' capital and helping them to learn how to transcend the challenges they face are only a few actions among those to be taken.

Tasha Austin, in "Linguistic Imperialism: Countering AntiBlack Racism in World Language Teacher Preparation," reminds us of the stark differences between preservice self-identified white teachers of world languages and the racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse students they are being trained to teach. This schism is problematic in that it contributes to linguistic hegemony and other concerns. Utilizing the Self-Study in Teacher Education Practices, Austin explores the ways that her instruction could be improved to increase the awareness of antiblackness in instruction and curriculum. Through self-reflection and accountability, participants experience positive ontological shifts in their understandings of antiblackness in world language instruction.

Through collaborative autoethnography, Sietta Parks, Jordan Bell, Sydoni Ellwod and Sherry Deckman in their article, "Going Beyond Anti-racist Pedagogical Practices: Co-constructing a Pro-Black Classroom," reflect on what building a pro-black classroom entails. Their study reveals that anti-racist practices require a stringent interrogation to truly address the deeply entrenched antiblackness that continues to plague the USA. The authors narrate the challenges encountered and the rewards gained by being immersed in a pro-black graduate course that affirms and uplifts both students and their professor.

Kathomi Gatwiri, in the sixth paper, examines the concepts of "racial literacy" and "trauma porn" within the Australian social work context and in education at large to help reimagine practices that can inform racial dignity and rethink the ways by which black lives are advocated for – through black scholarship. The article offers three pedagogical activities that can be used to enact anti-racist practices in classrooms. These include self-reflexivity, black storytelling and conscious collaboration with black people to promote safe practices.

The vision of the R.E.F.O.R.M Café, which is introduced in the seventh article, is a virtual space established in a HBCU and modeled after the World Café. Participants engaged in structured conversations to "gain a deeper understanding of undergraduate perspectives and concerns related to social justice" while preparing students to work professionally in the frontline of health-related fields. In their qualitative study, Kristine Fleming, Kenya Washington Johnson and Marie Okeke explored students' key values and their potential to advance realistic solutions for social change. Open discussions allowed participating students to express their concerns, listen to each other, refine roles and authority and achieve the ability to take up and "address important issues of racial equity."

Finally, in the eighth article, "Preparing Antiracist Educators through Transformative Teacher Education," Jennifer Waddell, Bradley Poos and Loyce Caruthers reported on teacher preparation program alumni sharing their preservice teacher experiences and current reflections of successful transformative anti-racist practices used in their classrooms. Data from the program study revealed two emergent themes: pedagogical experiences and foundational experiences. Results indicate that the embedded program had

an impact on shaping teacher candidates' mindsets, actions and pedagogical stances that are ripe for a transformative teacher preparation experience.

### Conclusion

In a true democracy, the demand for faculty and educators of all races to engage in anti-racist work should be an imperative. By showcasing examples of educators who use action to address racism and injustices perpetrated against the most vulnerable in the school system, this special issue challenges critics to go beyond mere anti-racist statements that have become common place in white dominant workplaces. The articles counter the colonial curriculum disregard for the value that diversity brings to society. Examples of actionable and tangible approaches offer models of how to disrupt the perpetuation of antiblack racism. The contributors' experiences confirm that it is possible to change the trajectory of our minority youth's future. Accordingly, schools of education and teacher preparation programs need to reflect on their role in reinforcing social inequities. Similarly, faculty of color need to engage in anti-racist work, for they also can be prone to biases, misconceptions and injustices. The editors of this special issue have done their part in addressing the critical need for a humanity-grounded reform and in helping to prevent unjust incarceration and murder of young black people (Milner, 2003). By creating a space for the work of transformative educators who have taken the initiative and responsibility to promote an action-embedded movement aimed at preserving BIPOC dignity, we are partaking in salvaging endangered lives. Teacher education programs need to demonstrate through immediate action their commitment to enacting a curriculum grounded in human equality, diversity of perspectives, compassion and tolerance.

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