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Critical Consciousness through an Anti-Racism Lens: Teaching Strategies for Counselor Educators

Eunice Lerma

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Clarissa L. Salinas

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, clarissa.salinas@utrgv.edu

Javier Cavazos Vela

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, javier.cavazos@utrgv.edu

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Critical Consciousness through an Anti-Racism Lens

Teaching Strategies for Counselor Educators

This teaching brief describes a creative and innovative teaching strategy to create inclusive and anti-oppressive learning spaces. Counselor education faculty can use the instructional strategy described in this teaching brief to: (a) engage in reflexivity and positionality regarding antiracist teaching and racial justice; (b) use specific actions that counter racism; (c) address microaggressions; (d) provide skills for dialogues around difficult conversations such as racial justice (Thurber et al., 2019); and (e) assign learning activities and assessment practices that allow students to reflect on and address racial justice (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021; Ng et al., 2022; Thurber et al., 2019).

EUNICE LERMA, CLARISSA SALINAS,
& JAVIER CAVAZOS VELA

Department of Counseling, University of Texas
Rio Grande Valley

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Author Note:

Correspondence concerning this practice brief should be addressed to: Eunice Lerma, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Department of Counseling, BNOBL 107, 2164 E. Jackson St., Brownsville, TX 78520.

Critical Consciousness Through an Anti-Racism Lens: Teaching Strategies for Counselor Educators

Graduate counseling students of color continue to face cultural isolation, tokenism, cultural barriers, racism, and discrimination (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2021). Because of these cultural and race-based challenges, many counseling students of color feel unsafe and isolated in clinical mental health courses (Henfield et al., 2011; Zeligman et al., 2015). For a profession that was built on a commitment to multiculturalism (Sue et al., 1992) and social justice advocacy, it is surprising that counseling students of color continue to face discrimination and race-related microaggressions in clinical mental health counseling programs. At the same time, it is not surprising given that the counseling profession is a microcosm of society, which continues to struggle with discrimination, racism, and systemic forms of oppression toward minoritized populations.

There are several explanations for why counseling students of color continue to face cultural challenges in their clinical mental health training programs. The explanation we believe to be most pressing and most within our control is what happens in teaching and learning practices in clinical mental health counseling courses. Because most counselor education faculty did not receive a plethora of training and support in their doctoral programs to learn about teaching pedagogy (Barrio Minto et al., 2014; Vela, 2020), they likely did not have extensive training about antiracist teaching pedagogy. Most doctoral programs focus on developing students' research skills, with less attention given to teaching and pedagogical skills. Therefore, faculty members might not have self-awareness, knowledge, and skills to enact antiracist teaching and learning practices. There is also evidence to suggest that faculty members might not engage in introspection and critical self-reflection to understand how biases, privilege, and attitudes toward racial justice can negatively impact learning environments (Betters-Bubon et al., 2022). When counselor education faculty do not engage in critical self-reflection and do not enact antiracist teaching practices, the impact could be a learning environment that contributes to minoritized students' perceptions of racism, discrimination, and race-based stress. Solving this problem is a priority for the American Counseling Association (ACA) and Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), who are committed to helping faculty implement antiracist teaching and learning practices. The profession reiterates this within *ACA code of ethics* section F.7.c., "Counselor educators infuse material related to multiculturalism/diversity into all courses and workshops for the development of professional counselors" (ACA, 2014, p.14.) Also, although the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 2016 standards require under Teaching B.3.h., "ethical and culturally relevant strategies used in counselor preparation" (CACREP, 2015, p. 35), there are many who state that this is not enough, "...as they fail to address anti-racism and anti-racist counseling practices" (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021, p. 2).

This teaching brief describes a creative and innovative teaching strategy to create inclusive and anti-oppressive learning spaces. The teaching strategy described below is intended to help counselor education faculty use antiracist and culturally relevant teaching practices to foster inclusive learning environments, which involves the use of self as an instrument to engage in critical reflection (Ng et al., 2022). Using the self as an instrument to engage in critical reflection (Ng et al., 2022), counselor educators will: (a) engage in reflexivity and positionality regarding antiracist teaching and racial justice, (b) use specific actions that counter racism; (c) address microaggressions; (d) provide skills for dialogues around difficult conversations such as racial justice (Thurber et al., 2019); and (e) assign learning activities and assessment practices that allow students to reflect on and address racial justice (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021; Ng et al., 2022; Thurber et al., 2019).

Researchers have begun to examine the critical incidents of cultural bias and race-based stress among counseling students of color in clinical mental health counseling programs. In a study with master's students of color in a counseling program, Seward (2019) identified critical incidents of multicultural training resistance. One student provided the following comment: "Sometimes people would say ignorant things and I didn't see them get called out, and I didn't feel comfortable doing it" (p. 41). This student's comment underscores how counseling students of color are often isolated in courses because instructors do not confront incidents of racism or cultural bias. Additionally, Hipolito-Delgado et al. (2021) revealed that graduate counseling students experienced discriminatory comments from their peers and tokenism in the classroom. Students expected their professors to intervene when discrimination occurred, and when instructors did not, students experienced a lack of support and *imposter syndrome* (Clance, 1985). These research findings are important because experiences with discrimination can negatively influence wellness, burnout, personal exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy among counseling students of color (Basma et al., 2021). One contributing factor may be that counselor education faculty have not engaged in introspection and critical self-reflection to enact antiracist teaching practices to create a safe and inclusive learning environment.

This counselor education teaching brief uses evidence-based teaching strategies to raise critical consciousness through an antiracism lens. The development and evaluation of innovative and creative teaching strategies that target antiracism and race-based is needed in undergraduate and graduate courses (Galan, et.al. 2021) stress in clinical mental health counseling courses. More information is needed to determine if instructors can effectively employ antiracist teaching and learning strategies to support culturally diverse students. Without such information, the ability to improve culturally diverse students' learning experiences in inclusive and safe learning environments will be limited.

Critical Consciousness in Counselor Education

In order to promote antiracist inclusive learning spaces, it is important for faculty to use the self as a teaching instrument and engage in introspection and critical self-reflection (Ng et al., 2022). Before faculty can enact antiracist teaching strategies in the classroom, they must self-reflect on their biases and values regarding racism and antiracism (Twyman-Ghosal & Lacorazza, 2021). The first step in this creative teaching strategy requires faculty to examine their own understanding of antiracism and inclusive learning. This is important because faculty must first identify racism before being able to address it with students (Twyman-Ghosal & Lacorazza, 2021). Faculty members also need to understand how their lived experiences, social identities, self-awareness, and knowledge regarding antiracism influences their teaching practices (Ng et al., 2022). Once faculty members use the self as a teaching instrument and engage in critical self-reflection, they can design intentional learning activities to help students develop awareness of their own biases and privilege to become reflective practitioners and promote empathy for others. These critical reflection activities involve welcoming difficult conversations about race, addressing microaggressions, and challenging racism in the classroom (McGowan et al. 2021). Finally, faculty can design intentional learning activities to help students reflect on their own experiences with cultural bias, both inside and outside the counseling program. Below is a description of our teaching strategy that is grounded in research-based practices in teaching and learning (Ng et al., 2022; Twyman-Ghosal & Lacorazza, 2021), as well as two case analyses.

Before, during, or after an academic semester, faculty can use the self as instrument to engage in critical reflection about antiracism and inclusive learning environments

- **Rationale:** Using themselves as an instrument to address their biases, values, and experiences regarding antiracist teaching pedagogy will enhance concept delivery in the course.
- **Learning objectives:** Faculty acknowledge their own biases and privilege (Twyman-Ghosal & Lacorazza, 2021) as well as commit to antiracist teaching
- **Activity:** Faculty use the self as an instrument to engage in a critical reflection writing activity and join a faculty learning community (Cox, 2004) to receive feedback.
- **Critical reflection questions for faculty reflection:**
 - What is antiracism?
 - Am I nonracist or antiracist, and how will I know?
 - How does my social and geographical location influence my identity, knowledge, and wisdom? .
 - What kinds of privilege do I have?

- How have I experienced racism or antiracism in my counseling programs or as a counselor educator?
- How does my course/s address inequality and injustice?
- What intentional learning activities can I implement to enact antiracist pedagogy?
- How do I create brave spaces to ensure minoritized students' psychological and social identity safety (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021).
- What learning objectives in my course could I develop that focus on antiracist practices?
- How can I share my experiences regarding racism with my students?
- How can I become and stay committed to continuous critical self-reflection and social activism (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021).
- How do I make sure that I value a diversity of approaches and not privilege dominant forms of knowledge (Thurber et al., 2019; Twyman-Ghosal & Lacorazza, 2021)?
- **Next steps:** Following critical self-reflection, faculty can share what they learned from this exercise in their faculty learning communities as well as with their students through personal disclosure. By using the self as an instrument to engage in critical reflection, faculty members will be better able to: (a) use specific actions that counter racism; (b) design intentional learning activities to create brave spaces to ensure minoritized students' psychological and social identity safety (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021); (c) address microaggressions; (d) provide skills for dialogues around difficult conversations such as racial justice (Thurber et al., 2019); (e) assign learning activities and assessment practices that allow students to reflect on and address racial justice (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021; Ng et al., 2022; Thurber et al., 2019); and (f) become committed to continuous critical self-reflection and social activism (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021).

We asked the third author to use the self as a teaching instrument (Ng et al., 2022), read the following articles (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021; Ng et al., 2022), and engage in the reflection questions from the teaching strategy listed above. Below were his critical reflections.

Faculty Self-Reflection

I typically teach an Introduction to Research Methods course. Prior to this reflection and using the self as a teaching instrument, I never considered how antiracist teaching was related to research methods in counseling. In other words, I thought my role as an instructor was to only teach course content related to research. After engaging in critical reflection with the focus questions, I came to different conclusions.

1. I now understand that as a Latinx male counselor educator, I need to be committed to a “...lifetime of critical self-reflection and intentional social activism” (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021, p. 2). From this critical reflection activity, I realized that I was never fully committed to antiracist pedagogy because I never put this important issue front and center in my introduction to research methods course. I now understand that I need to demonstrate through language and actions my commitment to becoming antiracist, including antiracist pedagogy in the classroom.
2. I now understand that I need to place antiracism and social justice at the center of any counselor education course. Before this self-reflection exercise, I would have started my introduction to research methods course the same way I always do by inviting students to introduce themselves and discussing course learning objectives. Now I understand that from day one, I need to make a concerted effort to antiracist teaching. Because I usually teach Introduction to Research Methods, I know that I need to help students think about how counseling research methods can address racial inequity as well as how counseling research can be used to address social justice issues and dismantle structural oppression.
3. I now understand the power of self-disclosure (Ng et al., 2022). From reflecting on the focus questions, I realized that I never disclosed anything regarding race in my Introduction to Research Methods course. Whether this lack of self-disclosure related with my thoughts that race does not relate to counseling research or personal views toward racial discussions, I realized that I never disclosed my negative experiences with racism in research. I now understand that by sharing my personal experiences with racism and oppression as related to counseling research, I will allow students to see my vulnerability and struggle with antiracist teaching (Ng et al., 2022). I hope that students will be more likely to engage in critical reflection and dialogue about race once they hear my personal stories.
4. I now realize that I have an important responsibility to help students develop critical consciousness as well as knowledge and skills to understand how to use research to remedy social justice issues. Therefore, I will create Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) in Introduction to Research Methods that help students develop antiracist knowledge and skills. As a result of this critical reflection activity, I developed the following SLOs: “After taking this course, students will be able to understand how counseling research can be used to dismantle structures of oppression,” and “After taking this course, students will develop critical consciousness and use research to address social justice in their respective communities.” By creating student learning objectives as well as assessment practices related to antiracist teaching, students will understand that racial justice is central to the course.
5. Before this teaching exercise, I did not know how to address microaggressions in the classroom. I now understand that I need to create brave spaces to ensure minoritized students’ psychological and social identity safety (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021). *Brave Spaces* refers to an environment in which both students and faculty acknowledge the challenges associated with having a discussion around difficult and/or sensitive topics such as race, power, and privilege.

6. From day one in my Introduction to Research Methods course, I will let students know that we will create a safe and inclusive environment so students know they can share personal and relevant experiences regarding race and racism. Although I have always been committed to this, I have never been intentional with language and practices related to psychological and social identity safety. I understand now that I have an important responsibility to create such a learning environment.
7. I understand that I need to use intentional learning strategies to create an effective and inclusive learning environment. Therefore, I will welcome dialogue about race, challenge microaggressions, and encourage students to reflect on their language. I will help students develop skills for engaging in dialogue regarding difficult and sensitive topics (Thurber et al., 2019). In my earlier years as an instructor, I will admit that I leaned more on the passive side as an instructor related to race and social justice. Whenever an issue might have come out in the past, I was not as ready or able to address issues around race. From reading the assigned articles and engaging in critical reflection, I now understand that I need to not only welcome dialogue and embrace difficulty in the classroom but also address microaggressions when they arise.
8. I will create several assessment practices to assess students' development of antiracist knowledge and skills as well as perceptions of the learning environment. First, I will invite students to complete critical reflection journals at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. The purpose of these critical reflection journals will be to monitor students' learning experiences related to race and racial justice. Second, I will invite students to complete an activist interview (Gonzalez & Coakley, 2021). I currently have an interview with a professor or counselor assignment in introduction to Research Methods. I will revise the assignment and ask students to find somebody who practices or uses research and who, "...embodies an antiracist identity and professional and political practice" (Gonzalez & Coakley, 2021, p. 34). The focus of the interview will be for my students to learn how counseling researchers have used research to address social justice, enact antiracist counseling practices, or dismantle oppressive practices.
9. To gather continuous feedback on my antiracist teaching strategies, I will join a faculty learning community (FLC) with colleagues in my department, college, and/or the university. This FLC space will provide opportunities to receive feedback on ideas generated from the self as the teaching instrument as well as feedback on my instructional strategies to create a safe and inclusive learning environment. The FLC will also help all participants hold each other accountable for antiracist beliefs and teaching practices (Gonzalez & Coakley, 2021).

In summary, I appreciate the opportunity to use the self as an instrument to reflect on antiracist teaching pedagogy. I am now committed to putting race and social justice front and center of every course I teach. Because of this instructional activity, I now understand that antiracist teaching involves a commitment to help students develop critical consciousness as well as learning activities and assessment practices that are aligned with antiracism. I also learned that I need to use intentional learning strategies to create an effective learning environment.

We also asked the second author to use the self as a teaching instrument (Ng et al., 2022), read the following articles (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021; Ng et al., 2022), and engage in the reflection questions from the teaching strategy listed above. Further, we asked her to provide a hypothetical case example of the teaching strategies in practice.

CASE EXAMPLE

I typically teach an Introduction to Counseling course. I remember reviewing journal entries and a student shared her negative experience with racism while taking my course. Her post read, *“I am having a difficult time making friends in class because I feel that I do not belong. During class this week we discussed privilege, and a classmate made a comment about how privileged I am to have time to take three classes. The comment hurt because my classmates do not know anything about me. I am taking three classes because of requirements by financial aid, I am a single mother, and I recently took on the responsibility of caring for my niece while my sister gets some medical care that she needs. I am struggling financially and feel I do not have much social support. I wish the instructor would have confronted the student about her comment”*.

I was surprised by the post and immediately felt guilty for not identifying the classmate’s discriminatory comment during class. At the time, I did not perceive the comment to be negative. Thus, I decided to consult with other members of my department about the incident. The department established a faculty learning community (FLC) in which similar missed opportunities could be presented and faculty could be supported in processing their own biases and ultimately grow in providing greater learning experiences for their students. The group decided to meet once every two months for about an hour. Some ground rules for the FLC were established to ensure confidentiality and safety for both the faculty member and the identity of student cases presented.

During the first FLC, everyone was invited to reflect on their own biases and privileges. I shared examples of my own privilege that I am educated with a doctoral degree, grew up in a middle-class family, am heterosexual, and am married. In that moment of reflection, I realized how different my script reads compared to my student. I shared some of my assumptions about students who are admitted to graduate programs to include that they should have a healthy sense of self and have a support network. I never had an opportunity in my graduate program nor training to reflect on such biases. Another faculty member normalized my assumptions and encouraged me to share what I learned from the activity.

In the next FLC, the topic of *Black Lives Matter* was presented. The purpose of the group was to normalize difficulty with race-based conversations and model how to hold such a conversation in the classroom with students. Faculty members shared personal reactions to the movement and how it has impacted them. Further, they responded to the following questions: “Have I experienced incidents of cultural bias outside the counseling program? How have these experiences impacted my life” (Thurber et al., 2019; Twyman-Ghosal & Lacorazza, 2021)? If faculty members answered no, they were asked to think about somebody who might have

experienced cultural bias. This question aims at increasing empathy. Faculty members were then encouraged to share the same questions with their students during class and facilitate a conversation about experiences with antiracism.

Evaluation of Effectiveness

When faculty engage in introspection and use the self as an instrument to implement antiracist teaching and learning strategies, they should evaluate the impact on student learning. First, before faculty complete the self-reflective exercise described in this teaching brief, they can complete the *Culturally Responsive Teacher Preparedness Scale* (Hsiao, 2015) and the *Critical Consciousness Scale* (Diemer et al., 2017). The *Culturally Responsive Preparedness Scale* (Hsiao, 2015), which could be adapted to meet faculty members' needs, could be used to measure culturally-relevant curriculum and instruction, relationship and expectation establishment, and group belonging formation. The *Critical Consciousness Scale*, which also could be adapted to meet faculty members' needs, could be used to measure critical reflection regarding perceived social inequities as well as critical action toward social inequities. After faculty engage in the teaching and learning strategies described in this teaching brief, we hypothesize that scores on these instruments would increase, representing higher levels of critical consciousness and cultural preparedness as well as a greater commitment to enact antiracist teaching practices. Second, faculty can evaluate the effectiveness of their antiracist teaching and learning strategies on students' sense of belonging and mattering. At the beginning of the semester, faculty can invite students to complete the *Sense of Belonging Scale* (Cole et al., 2020; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013) and the *General College Mattering Scale* (Tovar et al., 2009) to measure students' perceptions of sense of belonging and mattering. Then, after faculty engage in the teaching strategy described in this teaching brief and enact antiracist learning strategies, they can invite students to complete these instruments at the end of the semester. If faculty members were intentional with their antiracist teaching practices, we hypothesize that students' scores related to sense of belonging and mattering to increase, which would represent higher levels of antiracist teaching practices in the classroom.

One strategy to compare pre-and post-scores is to use estimates of clinical significance that can be determined in accordance with calculation of percent improvement (PI) values based on Lenz's (2020a, 2020b) description of procedures. While statistical and practical significance are related with statistical probabilities based on group-level differences, clinical significance estimates can refer to treatment gains over time at the individual participant level (Lenz et al., 2022; Kendall, 1999). Percent improvement values greater than 50% are interpreted as representing clinically significant improvement, 25% to 49% are interpreted as slightly improved without clinical significance, and less than 25% represent no clinical significance (Lenz 2020a). If most students improve scores on the instruments described by 25%, the faculty member

could feel confident that the antiracist teaching strategy had a positive impact on students' perceptions of mattering and sense of belonging (Ikonomopoulos et al., 2022), which are two potential outcomes related to antiracist teaching practices.

Assessing Student Learning

Faculty members can use several formal and informal assessment tools to assess student learning. The first step is to create a student learning outcome that is aligned with antiracism, race, race-based stress, and/or racial justice. For example, in an Introduction to Research Methods course, a learning objective could be: "After participating in this course, students will develop knowledge of how research can negatively impact minoritized populations" or "After participating in this course, students will develop skills to use research methods to design counseling interventions that target race-based stress in classrooms." Once faculty members develop at least one student learning outcome aligned with race, they can align assessment practices to that student learning outcome.

Faculty members can assign a critical learning journal (Smele et al., 2017; Thurber et al., 2019) for students to process their learning about antiracism and racial justice. One idea is to assign critical learning journals at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester to assess student growth. Critical reflection questions at the beginning of the semester need to align with a student learning outcome and could include something like, "Have I experienced incidents of cultural bias outside the counseling program? How have these experiences impacted my life? Have I experienced incidents of cultural bias inside the counseling program? How have these experiences impacted my life?" Critical reflection questions at the middle of the semester could include, "How has my instructor addressed inequality or injustice in this course? Has my instructor addressed microaggressions if they arose? Has my instructor created *brave spaces* to ensure minoritized students' psychological and social identity safety (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021)? Has my instructor valued a diversity of approaches and not privileged dominant forms of knowledge (Thurber et al., 2019; Twyman-Ghosal & Lacorazza, 2021)? And finally, critical reflection questions at the end of the semester could include, "What can I do now and in future counseling courses to become a socially-conscious counseling student and future counselor" (Thurber et al., 2019; Twyman-Ghosal & Lacorazza, 2021)? By assigning a critical learning journal aligned with student learning outcomes, faculty members will: (a) show students that race and racial justice matter in the classroom, and (b) assess students' growth as related to antiracism and race-based stress in the classroom.

In addition to a formal assessment that aligns with a student learning objective, faculty members could use an informal assessment such as an anonymous and ungraded survey that students complete in the middle of the semester. Faculty members could ask students to respond to the following critical reflection questions: "How has your learning experience been so far in this course? How have I handled the learning environment as related to discussions regarding

race and racial justice? How are you progressing toward the learning outcome related to race in this course?” By providing an informal assessment that addresses these or similar types of questions, faculty members will be able to check on students’ learning experiences regarding antiracism as well as progress toward the student learning objective.

Implications

While an important start to the teaching conversation around antiracist teaching pedagogy, our teaching brief is designed for a single faculty member. Our teaching brief does not address larger systemic issues that continue to hinder culturally diverse counseling students’ experiences. Also, although two authors in this teaching brief used the self as an instrument to engage in the teaching strategy, we did not collect data from students to evaluate the impact. Additionally, there are several unanswered questions including: (1) What happens when a faculty member refuses to use the self as an instrument to reflect on their own beliefs and values about antiracist pedagogy? (2) How do faculty implement antiracism outside the classroom (Williams et al., 2021)? (3) How does faculty critical reflection translate to improved student learning and sense of belonging? Future research is needed in these areas.

After using the self as an instrument to enact antiracist teaching pedagogy, faculty members can receive feedback for their own reflection in several ways. First, they can join a faculty learning community (Cox, 2004), which is defined as a group of six to eight faculty members who come together to discuss a teaching topic. FLCs have addressed a range of topics, including translingual teaching and learning, peer observations of teaching, and community engaged writing. The purpose of an FLC is to provide feedback in a supportive learning environment. If counselor education faculty engage in introspection and enact antiracist teaching practices, they can create a FLC with other faculty who also want to learn about antiracist teaching and anti-oppressive learning spaces. The goals of the FLC could be to (a) exchange ideas, (b) integrate antiracist teaching into various courses with different content, (c) align antiracist teaching practices to specific student learning outcomes, (d) discuss how to handle moments of racism and microaggressions in counselor education classrooms, and (e) hold each other accountable for becoming antiracist (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2022). The second way for faculty to receive feedback is to ask students through an anonymous survey. Once faculty integrate the teaching strategies described in this teaching brief into the classroom, they can ask students to respond to a few questions in the middle of the semester. Sample questions could include “How has your experience in this class been so far? How would you describe the learning environment in this class? Is there anything I need to do to continue to support a safe learning environment? What have you learned about antiracism as related to course topics so far? By asking students these or other types of questions about the learning environment, faculty can obtain important and valuable feedback.

There are several implications for future research. First, faculty members can engage in a scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) project where they use formal quantitative or qualitative research methods to explore the impact of using the self as an instrument to engage in critical reflection. Faculty members could partner with another faculty member to conduct a focus group or individual interviews with students. A phenomenological qualitative study with personal interviews would provide powerful insight into students' lived experiences in classrooms with antiracist pedagogy (Hannon et al., 2019; Young, 2017). Faculty members also could use a single group pre-test post-test design and give students a survey that measures constructs related to the purpose of the activity. For example, if the purpose of the teaching activity is to improve inclusion or sense of belonging in the learning environment, then faculty members could give instruments that measure these constructs before and after the semester. Then, they can analyze results to determine if there were any changes in perceptions of inclusion or sense of belonging.

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