Teaching about Race and Racism Effectively
Cyndi Kernahan
University of Wisconsin-River Falls

Outline for Today

1. What does it mean to be an antiracist educator?

2. Teaching about race and racism—resistance and belonging
# 1: What does it mean to be an antiracist educator?

Step 1 - See the problem of racism clearly
Greater Focus on Individual Causes


- Prejudice
- Law/Policy
- Both Equally

• 2020 poll: 58% agree racism is built into American systems
• But-no comparison to individual racism (Whites least agreeable)
• Softening of support for Black Lives Matter

Has This Changed Since May 2020?
The Definition of Racism is Key

- This is the gap between experts and novices: defining racism as systemic and not just individual

- In learning, White students take longer, but everyone starts with an individually-based definition

Winkler, 2017

Step 2-Translate the problem of racism to your teaching and work
Campus Climate

- Understanding the climate students face and taking it seriously
  - Stereotyping
    - $\frac{1}{2}$ of students of color reporting
  - Microaggressions
    - $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ of classroom or other learning spaces

Harwood, Choi, Orozco, Browne-Hunt, and Mendenhall, 2015; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015

Policy and Procedure Changes

- Change the ambient environment
- Use inclusive teaching practices
  - Structured opportunities to participate
  - Flexibility and accommodations

Kraus, Brown and Swoboda, 2019

Sathy and Hogan, 2019
Content and Discipline

- Findings ways to diversify your content
  - Identifying the diversity in the scientists, artists or experts from your field

- How and where does race and racism show up in your field?
  - *Rochelle Gutierrez in Math (U of I)*

Chat Break:
Please add questions to the chat
# 2: Teaching about race and racism: resistance and belonging

**What does Resistance Look Like?**

The behavior of students who fail to engage with the content, whether actively or passively

- Active: hostility, questions/comments, nonverbal
- Passive: not reading, nonattendance and/or not participating, nonverbal

Case and Cole, 2013
Different Ways of Resisting

• White students—more active anger, tears or pushback
  • Defend belief or discredit new information
  • *White fragility*—inability to tolerate slight racial stress

Case and Cole, 2013; DiAngelo, 2019; Tavris and Aronson, 2015

Different Ways of Resisting

• Students of color—more unexpressed anger, passive withdrawal
  • Being the “diversity” experience
  • Hearing oppressive comments
  • Inability to control own fate

Case and Cole, 2013; Tatum, 1992
Teaching Strategy-
How do we help to minimize and bypass resistance?

Connection to Us, Each Other

• Create moments of rapport
  • Eye contact, points of similarity, learning their names

• Create a sense of belonging
  • More talking!

Normalizing Feelings and Responses

- Using discussion to hear those struggles and experiences
- Ask to post ahead
- Review and facilitate in class or online

Chick, Karis and Kernahan, 2009

Blame and Guilt

- Blame and shame: often increase backlash
- Confession of privilege, feelings of guilt: could be part of learning, but should not be the point of learning

Lensmire et al., 2013; Moss-Rascusin et al., 2014
Questions?
cynthia.kernahan@uwrf.edu;
@CyndiKernahan

Link to slides and a resource list for further reading/listening:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1sqYWzY4oNoBBA3aaMcDjzDLYhfwvlKpO?usp=sharing

Epilogue: How can teaching about race affect instructors?
Chenjerai Kumanyika, NPR, 2015

Today, it means that when I discuss these shootings with my white students and my heart is bursting at the seams with outrage and grief, I must keep my voice and gestures gentle and calm and validate my students' most hurtful comments so they don't feel personally indicted.

Difficulties of This Teaching

- Can lower teaching evaluations
- Especially difficult for instructors of color and for women
- Especially difficult for adjuncts/graduate instructors

Boatright-Horowitz and Soeung, 2009; Crittle and Maddox, 2017; Sue, Rivera, Watkins, Kim, Kim, and Williams, 2011
The Role of our Colleagues and Campuses

- Developing a community for instructors and validating experience

- Solicit support and provide information to chairs/deans/provosts/colleagues

Ahluwalia, Ayala, Locke, & Nadrich, 2019;
Pasque, Chesler, Charbeneau, & Carlson, 2013;

Final Questions?

cynthia.kernahan@uwrf.edu;
@CyndiKernahan