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Purpose of this Framework

“Racism is a complex system of social and political levers and pulleys set up generations ago to continue working on the behalf of whites at other people’s expense, whether whites know/like it or not. Racism is an insidious cultural disease. ... So while I agree with people who say no one is born racist, it remains a powerful system that we’re immediately born into. It’s like being born into air: you take it in as soon as you breathe.” --Scott Woods¹

Context: Regardless of our personal or familial intentions, we have all been born into a racist and anti-Black society with deeply racist institutions and worldviews. The harm done by racism exists on a spectrum: from individual thoughts and ideas to overarching systems, from overt discrimination and hate to more subtle, passive microaggressions. As teaching artists in the Bay Area, we need to be aware of this particular cultural context where racism shows up covertly/implicitly as well as explicitly in supposed “progressive” communities.

Just as no individual escapes the impact of being born into racism, no institution is exempt from racism/white supremacy. One of the racist institutions we are confronted with the most in our work is our education system, including the very classrooms we step into as teachers. Based on what we have observed and experienced, and perhaps the racism that we may have perpetuated, it is imperative that we name these interactions, thoughts, ideas and systems. By naming racism and racial tensions, we are not “bringing race into the classroom;” it is already there. We are stepping into racist classrooms as a *consequence* of living in a racist society. As teaching artists, if we are not actively interrupting racism, we are complicit in perpetuating racism.

It is not enough to “not be racist.” We must practice anti-racism.

The History of this Framework: During the 2017-2018 school year, Performing Arts Workshop program and artistic staff collaborated on the first iteration of this Anti-Racist Framework. The intention was to create a useful tool for artists to reflect on their teaching practices and find ways to practice anti-racism in their classrooms. We wanted to consider the wide range of experiences with racism within the wide range of Performing Arts Workshop classrooms. We hoped to create norms that teaching artists could adopt to ensure that we were working actively against racism in the classroom.

Current Version of this Framework: We designed the Anti-Racist Framework to be a living document, one that would be consistently updated and evolving. Thanks to crucial feedback and

¹ “5 Things No One Is Actually Saying about Ani DiFranco or Plantations.” By Scott Woods. *Scott Woods Makes Lists* blog. Jan. 3, 2014. <https://scottwoodsmakeslists.wordpress.com/2014/01/03/5-things-no-one-is-actually-saying-about-ani-difranco-or-plantations/>

input from Performing Arts Workshop artistic staff members, we are able to present this new version of the Anti-Racist Framework for 2019. We remain open to an evolving understanding of the practice of anti-racism, and we invite you (the person reading this) to share your thoughts with us.

Anti-Racism and the Arts: It is true that anti-racism in the classroom is about content, but it's also about pedagogy or the "way of teaching". We don't have to "stop teaching art" in order to practice anti-racism. By carefully examining our pedagogy, it is possible to practice anti-racism in the classroom and teach art at the same time. Consider the following questions as you work with your students:

Anti-Racist Framework

Before you enter the classroom...

1. **Consider your relationship to your material and your students.**
 - a. What are the racial biases you bring into the classroom?
 - b. What are the possible omissions/negligence/areas of inattention?
 - c. What assumptions are you making about the students you're working with?
 - d. If the art form you practice and teach is rooted in communities different from the one(s) you identify as a member of, what kind of framing, either cultural or historical, might be necessary?
 - e. Are you highlighting material that reflects artists of various racial backgrounds, including making sure that the community you are teaching in is represented?
 - f. Are your selections fully integrated into the curriculum and substantial or one dimensional and patronizing? (This may require research.)

2. **Get to know the community.**
 - a. Did you engage the classroom teachers and site staff about specific student needs, e.g., what kind of books they're reading, what materials they're using, what kind of art they're exposed to?
 - b. Have you researched the community that you are teaching in? This includes the geographical history as well as the ethnic history.
 - c. Are you introducing work by artists of multiple races, religions and countries?
 - d. Do you give space for students to share the issues affecting them and their communities?
 - e. Are you giving space for Black students and students of color to bring their race, culture, and community values into the classroom?
 - f. Are you affirming the language use and languages spoken of all students?
 - g. Are you creating a safe and comfortable environment for students to bring experiences with racism and discrimination into the classroom for discussion and creative release?
 - h. Do you offer platforms for students to discuss how they embrace their ethnic history?
 - i. Can you walk around the community without being afraid? Why or why not?

3. **Respect the cultural and historical context of your art form.**
 - a. What do your students need to understand about the history/context of specific artists to be grounded in your art form?
 - b. Are you considering who is telling the history of that art form?
 - c. Do you address the history and impact of erasure within the art form?
 - d. Are you sharing the origins and racial identity of the creators of the art form?
 - e. Are you articulating your positionality and power in relationship to your art form and teaching of it?
 - f. What opportunities are you creating for Black students and students of color to demonstrate what they already know about the art form?
 - g. What opportunities are you creating for Black students and students of color to see themselves in the history, ongoing practice, and future of the art form?

4. **Challenge your assumptions about what students are capable of.**
 - a. What are you assuming about the students that you are teaching? What are the origins of these assumptions?
 - b. What are your assumptions about teaching? (ie. What does being “engaged” look like? What is “good” behavior?)
 - c. Which students are you the most comfortable with? Why?
follow-up questions-
 - i. What was your first thought/reaction when thinking of a particular individual and/or a group of students?
 - ii. Where did this thought/reaction come from? Where and when did you hear and/or experience a positive event with an individual/group of people like the students you are thinking about?
 - iii. What have you done to unlearn your perception?
 - iv. What support do you need from the Workshop?
 - v. What strategies can you apply to regularly reflect, confront, and challenge your own racism, biases, and stereotypes?
 - vi. How does going through this list of reflection questions affect your preparation in lesson planning, facilitation mind, and vulnerability?

 - d. Which students are you most uncomfortable with? Why?
follow-up questions-
 - i. What was your first thought/reaction when thinking of a particular individual and/or a group of students?
 - ii. Where did this thought/reaction come from?
 - iii. Where and when did you hear and/or experience a negative event with an individual/group of people like the students you are thinking about?

- iv. What have you done to unlearn your perception?
 - v. What support do you need from the Workshop?
 - vi. What strategies can you apply to regularly reflect, confront, and challenge your own racism, biases, and stereotypes?
 - vii. How does going through this list of reflection questions affect your preparation in lesson planning, facilitation mind, and vulnerability?
- e. How are you combating the assumption that Black students and students of color will not (or cannot) meet the same expectations as their white counterparts?
 - f. Are you expecting more complex and refined performances from white students than from Black students and students of color?
 - g. Are you challenging all students in a way that allows for productive, creative growth?
 - h. Are you challenging white students to grow more than Black students and students of color?
 - i. Are there opportunities for all students to shine and share their expertise?

5. Specifically resist anti-Blackness in your classroom.

- a. Anti-Blackness is global. It works within communities of color as well as white supremacist institutions and culture. Can you recognize and name anti-Blackness specifically when it occurs? How do you know? What are the signals?
- b. What is your perception of your Black students? How are you challenging anti-Blackness in your perception of Black students?
- c. Are Black students in your class disproportionately punished, sent out of the classroom, or called out as examples of misbehavior?
- d. Are you interrupting anti-Black expressions and actions from other students and teachers?
- e. How are you specifically highlighting and crediting the contributions of Black thinkers and artists to your art form, personal learning, and world as we know it?

During your time in the classroom...

6. Expect and address discomfort.

- a. When do you avoid discussions of race?
- b. Do you shy away from subjects or conversations that might highlight or reveal racial or cultural differences between you and your students?
- c. How do you acknowledge and discuss the way that race determines power and privilege, both inside and outside the classroom?

- d. How are you thinking creatively about modeling ways of disrupting systems of oppression?
 - e. How are you creating space for students to provide one another feedback which may illuminate personal awareness of racial/cultural differences and inequities?
 - f. What tools do you have for supporting students through such interpersonal discourse, both individualized and general/systemic?
- 7. Be conscious of who you call out and who you call in.**
- a. Are you reprimanding Black students and students of color differently than white students for the same actions?
 - b. Are you characterizing the behavior of white students as creative/productive and the behavior of Black students and students of color as disruptive?
 - c. How are you strategizing to increase participation from Black students and students of color?
 - d. Are you using exclusion as a punishment, particularly for Black students?
 - e. How are you interrupting racist assumptions/statements/actions in the classroom?
 - f. When you notice students are struggling with tasks, what follow-up questions are you asking to guide the thinking process?
 - g. Who do you find yourself supporting the most or finding yourself in the closest proximity to? Why?

8. Use action-oriented language when assessing student work.

- a. What is your criteria for assessing student work?
- b. What cultural values guide your assessment?
- c. Are you thoughtfully evaluating Black students and students of color according to the specific actions they take as individuals?
- d. Do you avoid reductive language like “good” vs. “bad,” and deficit-based language like “disruptive,” “rude,” and “lazy”?
- e. How are you giving out praise? Who gets it and why? Is it specific and constructive or just “good job”?
- f. Do you challenge students with your feedback?
- g. Do you challenge white students more often than Black students and students of color?
- h. Are you open and available to make space for feedback from your students, especially Black students and students of color, about your teaching style and/or curriculum in relation to their own background/experience?
- i. How often do you share your own art-making from your own background/culture/experience with your students?

9. Expand and resist white supremacist definitions of intelligence.

White supremacy enforces a definition of “intelligence” that typically privileges the written word over other forms of communication and expression, normalizes perfectionism and either/or (binary) thinking, devalues conflict and disagreement, and rewards quantity over quality.² Black students and students of color may bring intelligences into the classroom that are left out of and devalued by this narrow definition. And although individual students have a wide variety of experiences, statistically Black students and students of color are disproportionately affected by lack of access to educational resources and are required to conform to white supremacist standards to succeed in school.

- a. Do you provide opportunities for students to divert from what white supremacist (hegemonic) institutions, including the school and classroom you are walking into, deem “intelligent”?
- b. How are you creating problem-solving exercises that draw on multiple kinds of intelligence?
- c. Are you recognizing the varying cultural values of your Black students and students of color and how those values might shape what counts as “intelligence”?

² “The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture.” From *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups*, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, ChangeWork, 2001.

<http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html>

- d. Are you creating equitable opportunities to highlight intelligences and styles of creativity that are normally marginalized?
- e. Do you create opportunities for students to teach each other, drawing on their racial and cultural identities and experiences, by example?

10. Consider what you say to/about your students.

- a. How do you talk to/about your Black students and students of color to others?
- b. How do you avoid reductive and subjective-based language like “good” vs. “bad”?
- c. How do you avoid deficit-based language like “disruptive,” “rude,” and “lazy”?
- d. How do you interrupt racist assumptions students/teachers/directors make about an individual, their own communities, other communities or the sites/neighborhoods?

After you leave the classroom...

11. Ask for feedback.

- a. How are you using the cycle of reflection and revision to address your own teaching practices?
- b. Did you solicit feedback from students, teachers, and site staff?
- c. After receiving feedback, are you revising your choices to improve your anti-racist practices?
- d. How are you communicating to your students that you’re looking for feedback, particularly around issues of race?
- e. How do you receive feedback in the moment? Do you listen actively to feedback? Do you ask questions in order to better understand, or do you use questions to be defensive?
- f. What happens when you are triggered by feedback? Do you have the tools to navigate it or do you need support?
- g. Are you prepared to apologize if appropriate?
- h. Do you thank the person providing feedback for taking the time and energy to help you?
- i. Are you also engaging in your own personal reflection consistently and honestly, or are you allowing the burden of improving your anti-racist practice to fall solely on your students or colleagues?

12. Do your homework.³ If you are not doing work to sharpen your anti-racist practice, you are most likely doing harm.

- a. What are you reading, watching or listening to that contributes to your anti-racist teaching practice?
- b. How are other teachers engaging with race in the classroom, and how can you apply those practices appropriately in your teaching?
- c. If you were complicit in white supremacy in the classroom, how could you repair harm and do differently next time?
- d. How do you seek to understand concepts or feedback around race that come up both casually and in professional developments?

13. Consider what you say about your students.

- a. How do you talk about your Black students and students of color to others?
- b. How do you describe them to colleagues at Performing Arts Workshop and to people outside our organization?
- c. How do you avoid reductive and subjective-based language like “good” vs. “bad”?
- d. How do you avoid deficit-based language like “disruptive,” “rude,” and “lazy”?
- e. How do you interrupt racist assumptions other people make about your students or the sites/neighborhoods where you teach?

³ See “Readings and Resources” section for a place to start!

Readings And Resources

- [The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture](#)
- [8 Ways Teachers Can Address White Supremacy in the Classroom](#)
- [10 Insidious Ways White Supremacy Shows Up in Our Everyday Lives](#)
- [Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools by Monique W. Morris](#)
- [Interview with Monique W. Morris](#)
- [Teaching Strategies from Teaching Tolerance](#)
- [Changing the Rules of the Game: Youth Development and the Structures of Racism](#)
- [Decolonizing the Classroom- Rethinking Schools](#)
- [Racial Inequities: What Schools Can Do Pt.1](#)
- [Racial Inequities: What Schools Can Do Pt.2](#)
- [How One Berkeley High Teacher Tackling White Supremacy](#)
- [Dismantling anti-Black bias in democratic workplaces](#)
- [We Should Stop Saying “People of Color” When We Mean “Black People”](#)
- [As a black woman, I hate the term 'people of colour'](#)