OPEN WINDOWS, OPEN MINDS

Developing Antiracist, Pro-Human Students

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FOREWORD BY CORNELIUS MINOR AND KASS MINOR

CORWIN Literacy

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Opening Windows Into Overlooked Contributions, Histories, and Experiences

Content That Expands Understanding

As part of a course titled Anti-Racist School Practices to Support the Success of All Students facilitated by Initiatives for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students (IDEAS) instructors JoAnne Kazis and Johnny Cole, participants were led through an exercise where they were given time to list as many People of Color in the following categories:
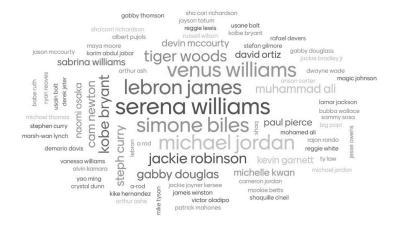
- Mathematicians and scientists

- Athletes

- Politicians

- Actors and musicians

I felt frustrated, because most of the mathematicians, scientists, and politicians that came to mind for me were White men. When Johnny and JoAnne shared the word cloud generated from our responses, George Washington Carver, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Katherine Johnson, Barack Obama, Ayanna Pressley, and

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez showed up on some lists, but the list of athletes, actors, and musicians were far more robust than the lists of mathematicians, scientists, and politicians. And even the lists that were generated were shorter than they seemed, considering that any misspellings of names and acronyms appeared as separate entries (e.g., AOC and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez). Figure 5.1 shows the word clouds generated in this exercise.

Athletes of Color

Mathematicians & Scientists of Color

Musicians/Actors of Color

lavar burton thelonious monk
samira wiley chadwick bozeman dwayne johnson
jada pinkett smith lupita nyongo marvin gaye ella fitzgerald billie holiday
kendrick lamar childish gambino darius rucker rouw alejandro raekwon
buckweat zidako daveed diggs lin-manuel miranda lucy liu tokischa peralta zendaya
mf doom morgan freedman zayn malik sidney poitier little richard sixto rodriguez
michael b jordan ray charles mindy kaling kevin hart gabrielle union
j balvin margaret cho kelly rowland drake michael j jordan
diana ross shonda rhimes janet jackson whitney houston ming na wen william grant still
spike lee kanye stevie wonder john legend kerri washington
alicia keyes maluma chandra wilson bad bunny nina simone eddie murphy
the weeknd aretha franklin alicia keys nicki minaj tyler perry
camila cabello oprah michael jackson morgan freeman monica yoyo ma
trevor noah sam cooke celia cruz her will smith beyonce halsey prince nilci ming
harry belfonte bob marley offset sech cardi b lizzo usher da baby
john batista madlib luda denzel washington jay z rihanna chris rock tupac dave chapelle
lil naz x bell hooks nicole byer idris elba tina turner sandra oh viola davis solange octavia spencer
toni morrison selena jay-z saba the supremes
michael jordan kerry washington bruno mars khalan gibral thundercat da baby
frank ocean brandy chadwick bosman kanye west oprah winfrey carmen miranda notorious big
sarah oh tracey morgan leon bridges samuel l jackson raphael saddiq
lunay styles p chadwick boseman isabel allende queen latifah
biggie yo yo ma jennifer lopez selena quintanilla jamie fox
taraji p henson juice world bill cosby sasheer zamata
jordan peele weezy james iha jamilo jamil ben e king louie armstrong nat king cole
forrest whitaker whoopie goldberg anderson paak teddy pendergrass mindy kaling
zendaya whitney huston esperanza spalding megan markle khalid
miles davis michelle williams lionel richie gerald levert ll cool j
nicki minaj viola davies tracy chapman angelique kidjo ghostface killah
sammy davis jr freddie gibbs

Politicians of Color

elijah cummings
thurgood marshall clarence thomas
chicago mayor kim janey spelling maxine waters
corey booker condoleeza rice mayor spicer framingham
andrew yang alexandria ocasio-cortez ayana pressley
raphael warnick ayanna pressley ilham omar
tito jackson colin powell
iliana presley barack obama ayana presley
stacy abrams kamala harris sonia chang diaz
michelle wu jaime harrison
felix arroyo aoc deval patrick ruben gallego
michelle obaa setti warren warren mlk sonia sotomayor
latoya cantrell john lewis ayanna presley alexandria oc
julian castro ray nagin obama jessie jackson
j jackson cori bush ben carson cory booker val demmings
ilham omar stacey abrams clyburn mia love barak obama
alexandra ocassio-cortez nelson mandela
judge sotomayor fredrick douglas
alexandria ocasio cortez alexia ocasio-cortez

When it came to listing athletes and musicians, it was a lot easier to list Black and Brown people, depending on what sports and music genres came to mind; for example, there were fewer listed with classical music and golf, but thanks to athletes like Serena Williams and Naomi Osaka, the tennis references were a little more racially diverse. The same was true with actors, depending on what movies and TV shows we tend to watch.

I had a similar experience in another workshop when participants were asked to name the first country we could think of starting with the letter *D*. Without fail, most of us chose Denmark. Perhaps one or two people said the Democratic Republic of the

Congo or the Dominican Republic; the facilitators shared that in another workshop, not even the participants from the Dominican Republic named their own country—they, too, chose Denmark. I don't think anyone named Djibouti or Dominica.

So what does this indicate? The results of both of these exercises show how White people have long been centered in all spaces—music, sports, mathematics, science, politics, and the like—and that all of us, whether White or a Person of Color, have difficulty calling to mind an equal number of standouts from marginalized populations. This is not by accident but by design. Antiracist work requires us first to acknowledge the ways Whiteness is centered—an attempt to exclude all other people and contributions from history, current discourse, and ultimately, power.

It's important for educators to feature the contributions of people from marginalized groups who are not typically featured in traditional White-centric curriculum and those who contribute to fields where they are not usually celebrated by profiling Black and Brown mathematicians, scientists, engineers, and politicians without tokenizing or focusing on typical fields like acting, music, and sports. Further, we must be sure to explore the point of view and agency of all involved stakeholders to avoid the negative impact of telling a single story when teaching history (e.g., *How did enslaved people resist enslavement? How did the Indigenous respond to the Indian Removal Act?*). We need to incorporate literature featuring people from marginalized groups doing everyday things in multiple genres (e.g., Black and Brown characters in fantasy and science fiction stories, playing in the snow, having fun with a pet, learning how to play an instrument, and trying to run from the moon) instead of only focusing on struggle, challenges, and injustices.

A critical part of being an effective ABAR practitioner means ensuring that students can critically analyze the impact of historical and current events and engage in perspective-taking and understand multiple points of view. These learning experiences will give White students the tools needed to move from unconscious incompetence, where they don't know what they don't know and have to commit a good deal of cognitive effort to decentering themselves to conscious competence, where centering the stories of all people is as second nature as riding a bike without having to think about balancing, pedaling, steering, or braking.

Prior to the beginning of K–12 learning experiences, children are inundated with the message that Whiteness is the dominant culture. This extends from the images in the media and children's books to the content we engage students with in schools. This chapter will support you as you provide students with regular opportunities to engage with accurate and inclusive history and content that represents the lives, interests, contributions, and experiences of other races of people. You will also be equipped to support students to ask questions instead of making assumptions about social issues, to engage in productive struggle as they challenge false narratives about people from marginalized groups, and to adopt a growth mindset about their ability to continue this learning. This work will help students to see themselves as belonging to the larger human family.

Breathe and Reflect

What is your experience with celebrating Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) during specific heritage months (e.g., Black History Month, Arab American History Month, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, Indigenous Peoples Month)? How would you like to expand your students' experiences celebrating the histories and contributions of People of Color throughout the year? ■

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Connecting Across Difference

By incorporating antibias, antiracist (ABAR) practices and centering more learning experiences around traditionally underrepresented groups, teachers will learn to effectively engage students in learning about the contributions, histories, and lives of people who are racially different throughout the school year—and not just during designated history/heritage months.

In the summer of 2018, I had the privilege of participating in the Multicultural Teaching Institute at the Meadowbrook School in Weston, Massachusetts. I don't know about you, but when I go to a conference and there is high-quality swag as soon as you walk in, I get excited. The binder they had prepared for participants was on point, as was the tumbler we were all gifted with. One of the other gifts was the invitation to include our pronouns on our name tags. I didn't realize how much of a gift it was that day, because as a cisgender heterosexual woman, I hadn't been very mindful of my pronouns up until that point. I didn't have to be. I see my gender and sexual orientation mirrored back to me all the time. Additionally, during the institute, I didn't meet anyone whose pronouns differed from the pronouns I would have used without knowing, so my mindset stayed pretty much the same. I did wonder how someone who also identified as Christian would respond to seeing me share my pronouns. In my experience up until that point, most people I knew who professed Christian faith did not discuss gender identity, and most of what I heard in those spaces espoused heteronormativity and cisgenderism.

I didn't encounter the cognitive dissonance that accompanies a shift toward an expanded understanding of gender identity until I was part of the White Privilege Symposium in the fall of 2018 where I first met someone who shared with me that their pronouns were they and them. I will call them Lily. I committed a significant amount of cognitive effort to trying to ensure that I did not misgender my new friend. However, when I started to listen to them share about their experiences and frustration as someone who is gender nonconforming instead of trying to be perfect with my pronoun usage, I began to learn. For example, when they shared their disappointment about the gender-neutral bathrooms being farther away from the main meeting room than the gendered bathrooms, I initially wondered why Lily didn't go to the women's bathroom, since, in my mind, they presented as female. But then I asked myself how I'd feel if the nearest bathrooms were labeled *For White Women Only*? This is something my ancestors faced not too long ago. I could go into that bathroom, but I would feel excluded and potentially concerned for my safety.

When we went to the same breakout session shortly after we met, our facilitator entered the room and greeted participants by saying "Hello, ladies and gentlemen!" In the past, I wouldn't have noticed how that greeting interrupts belonging

for people who don't conform to the gender binary. I noticed it then. Now my pronouns appear regularly. They are in my e-mail signatures and on my social media profiles. I need to remain diligent to ensure that sharing my pronouns isn't performative. It's the same with Indigenous land acknowledgments. It's not a box to check but a way of seeing the world.

One of the best examples I've seen of teaching students to authentically connect with one another across differences is the partnership between Melissa Collins and Michael J. Dunlea, both elementary educators who are both friends and colleagues. Melissa is a National Board Certified teacher who works with second-grade students at the John P. Freeman Optional School in Memphis, Tennessee. Michael is also a National Board Certified teacher who teaches third grade at the Tabernacle Elementary School in the Tabernacle Township School District, which is a rural preK–8 public school district in Tabernacle, New Jersey. Melissa and all of her students identify as Black, and Michael and all of his students identify as White. Michael's students met Melissa's students through Empatico.

Although Empatico is highlighted in this section, there are other platforms and tools that can help facilitate cross-classroom communication and relationship building. Platforms such as Edmodo.com and ePals.com are geared directly for schools, and Google Hangouts or Skype might offer similar functionality. Talk with your school's technology director to learn what's possible, and please always prioritize student safety and privacy.

Empatico (Empatico.com) is a free online tool that connects classrooms around the world, empowering teachers and students to explore the world through experiences that spark curiosity, kindness, and empathy. The online tool combines video with activities designed to foster meaningful connections among students ages six to eleven, and Empatico provided the students with the opportunity to mitigate the impact of segregation by building authentic relationships with one another. Melissa and Michael's classes connected with one another online and engaged in learning assignments that they shared with one another. They even surprised Michael's students by arranging for them to meet Melissa in person. Melissa traveled 1,000 miles to meet them.

https://bit.ly/38ejNbY

When I interviewed Michael, he shared how illuminating it was to notice the difference between how his students processed Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday and how Melissa's students processed it. Melissa's class, populated by Black students, experience Black history as a vital part of their lives and stories and feel the pressure of violence against Black

bodies imminently; Michael's students, all of whom are White, though they have had some exposure to King's words, have not lived with the anxiety of violence yet want to appreciate and love all people. In other words, the White students were looking through the window but had not fully understood the lived experiences of their Black peers. In Michael's words:

> We had them all making posters for Martin Luther King. We've done this for three or four years where around his birthday, they create their own signs with their own messages. We call it the *I Have a Dream* lesson where they all say what their dream would be. We frame it with the history of Martin Luther King's dream. Prior to George Floyd, we had a nice balance of kids asking for racial harmony and safer, cleaner worlds with no pollution. Post–George Floyd, almost every child in Melissa's class was saying, "Black Lives Matter! Don't kill us!" And the White kids were still saying, "Let's all love each other!" It's like they have on rose colored glasses because they're not dealing with the reality that the other communities are. I had a student who created a sign that said, "All lives matter." She didn't mean it the way some people have intended it as a counter to Black Lives Matter. She meant it from the pure heart of a seven-year-old. She genuinely believes, especially after making friends in Melissa's class, that all lives matter, but if someone sees her poster out of context, it could come across like she's sharing a harmful sentiment that she heard at home. But we want her to continue to truly believe that all lives matter.

One of the benefits of students connecting with students who are racially different is that they have the opportunity to move beyond false narratives and stereotypical ideas to building authentic relationships, being able to consider new perspectives, and to discovering what we have in common as well. For a White student to learn about experiences of People of Color from People of Color is a powerful way to help undo the harm caused by our segregated communities.

Michael shared, "As a classroom teacher we are often dedicated to providing for our students what they need most. Sometimes in our highly segregated communities what they need most is just a chance to spend time with people who are different." Michael explained that Empatico provided a chance to merge two very different classrooms into one group. Michael and Melissa paired students who became much more than pen pals; they became friends by sharing reading time, and they met several times just to chat over the platform. Michael explained, "Young minds are plastic, their biases are still in the forming stages or are not even present yet. These friendships provide me with hope that they will act as a personal rejection to the seeds of racism or hate that will be planted later." Giving students real experiences where they meet and become friends with students who identify

with different racial backgrounds can keep negative biases from taking root down the road. It makes the world a smaller place where we can spend time with people who look and sound different but have more in common than is initially appreciated," explained Michael.

Reflecting on her experience, Melissa shared, "Living in the South as a young Black girl, I had very little interaction with White students. I had minimum connections with another race or culture until college. I had to learn how to foster a relationship with someone who was different from me if I was going to survive. When I returned to Memphis to teach, I entered a predominantly Black and Brown classroom. I was not surprised, but not much about my community had changed."

Melissa explained that helping her students to connect with kids from a different racial background was a dream she held as an educator, and collaborating online through Empatico.com helped the dream become reality. "I thought, what if Michael and I could inspire others to step out of their comfort zone to promote racial harmony for today's students? If we continue to do this each year, we will create current leaders who would fight for justice."

Melissa continued, "The connection with Michael's class changed the racial narrative for my students and others to spark empathy, curiosity, and critical thinking skills. . . . The students learned that they had commonalities such as favorite colors, family dynamics, and activities. However, they had some differences: food, festivals, holidays, dialect, or communities. The unique aspect of the connection is that they learned to appreciate each other regardless of their differences. Often, our geographic locations, culture, and traditions shape us, but we must realize as a nation, positive connections help to create our democracy."

In Michael's experience, "Teachers, especially White teachers, need to push past the fear of making a mistake. We want to change the world but are afraid to get started on deconstructing the systems of racism. Developing and nurturing relationships is the first step in getting to a space where the knowledge can overcome the fear. Our students, Black and White, desperately need us to get into our discomfort and get moving on this."

It's important to keep in mind that you may not need technology to make such connections happen, but there are many tools at our fingertips that can make it easier to connect with a classroom whose student population comes from a different racial background than your own. I recommend doing some research through social media groups that you trust, asking simply who might be interested in forming a cross-classroom connection such as this, then determining (with consultation with your school's technology team) if Empatico or another platform can help you get started.

Breathe and Reflect

If you are working in a school with mostly White students who are between the ages of six and eleven, use this space to reflect on the possibility of implementing Empatico with your students. If your students are older, how might you provide them opportunities to connect with people who are racially different? ■

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