Anti-Racist Curricular Work

Anti-Racism Across the Curriculum: Practicing an Integrated Approach to WAC and Writing Center Faculty Development

Rebecca Hallman Martini and Travis Webster

> *English is my native tongue, however due to my extremely rural up bring and possible other underlining conditions for which I have not been tested, I am sometimes much less proficient then some would expect . . . [I] dread editing with my PIs because it feels as if they are removing me for the paper . . . . This is particularly frustrating because it seems as if the only problem beyond grammar was not with [the] message itself, but the way the words I used to disseminate it. . . . the most common justification for changes are 'it just feels a little off, let's try it this way. See doesn't that sound better?'. . . . I think, speak, and write in the same manner, which is not what most would consider to be proper English.*
>
> —Eli, Black Male Entomology Graduate Student

Faculty across disciplines teach writing in ways that are both implicitly and explicitly racist. Students are hesitant to name it so, as Eli's words suggest. His "[removal]" from written work with his PIs is more than just a consequence of linguistic diversity, but is, in actuality, enacting harm on his scholarly identity and, ultimately, on his humanity. And yet, this kind of material assault is often not named as such, likely due to an assumption that "racist" is supposedly too harsh of a descriptor for academia. In *How to Be An Antiracist,* Ibram X. Kendi urges us, however, to think of "racist" as "descriptive," since "the only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it—and then dismantle it" (9). Doing so requires a recognition that many white people have trouble acknowledging: "there is no in-between safe space of 'not racist.' The claim of 'not racist' neutrality is a mask for racism" (9). Instead, Kendi argues for the regular doing of antiracist work via "persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination" as we continuously work to be people who support anti-racist policy through actions and words (23). By extension, most faculty development programs housed in writing centers (WCs) and writing across the curriculum (WAC) initiatives are "not racist." Thus, as two white

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writing program administrators (WPAs), we call for anti-racist faculty development work that encourages other white faculty teaching across disciplines and other white colleague administrators to recognize and act upon this reality. In doing so, we also recognize that anti-racist faculty development is often necessary for all faculty across a range of identity types, since so much of institutionalized education functions according to and within a white racial habitus, as Asao Inoue reminds us (*Ecologies*; *Labor-Based*). In this essay, we draw on April Baker-Bell's *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy* to reimagine how our everyday work in faculty development might change to become more anti-racist through an integrated—rather than one-off or statement-centered—approach.

Specific research into what WAC and WC anti-racist faculty development actually looks like is limited. Both the Association for Writing Across the Curriculum and the International Writing Center Association have anti-racism and social justice statements. WAC and WC scholarship have a tradition of arguing for anti-racist approaches to tutoring and administration, focused primarily, however, on work with students within their programs and tutor training (Greenfield and Rowan; Condon and Young; Hallman Martini and Webster; Riddick and Hooker). Similarly, Cameron Bushnell's recent WAC research argues for the value of recognizing WAC implications in international teaching assistants' experiences, but does not connect his conversation to faculty development. A notable WAC exception focused on faculty development is Mya Poe's article in *Across the Disciplines'* Special Issue, "Anti-Racist Activism: Teaching Rhetoric and Writing." Yet, Poe focuses on course content and raising awareness around stereotyping students.

Recent open-source projects have provided the discipline with concrete resources for anti-racist WAC work, however. Genevieve García de Müeller, for example, recently developed an "Anti-racist WAC Toolkit" that houses valuable documents and specific language for an integrated approach to faculty development. Similarly, we offer the chart below, which overviews writing assignments, language choice, evaluation/assessment, and peer work, in hopes that it will be a usable tool for faculty development across a range of disciplines. Our chart is inspired by Baker-Bell's "linguistic justice," which she defines as "an anti-racist approach to language and literacy education that seeks to dismantle anti-black linguistic racism and white linguistic hegemony and supremacy in classrooms and the world" (7). Given that "social justice" has become a buzzword, as Baker-Bell points out, we prefer to use linguistic justice because of its specificness to the use of words and language in writing. Baker-Bell offers ten framing ideas, of which we

focus on five that we find especially relevant to WC and WAC faculty development. These ideas include:

1. critically interrogating white linguistic hegemony and Anti-Black Linguistic Racism;

2. naming and working to dismantle the normalization of Anti-Black Linguistic Racism;

3. rejecting the myth that the same language, White Mainstream English (WME), and language education that have been used to oppress Black students can empower them;

4. acknowledging that Black Language is connected to Black people's ways of knowing;

5. relying on Black Language oral and literary traditions to build Black students' linguistic flexibility and creativity skills (Baker-Bell 34)

In the following chart, we identify racist situations we have encountered with other white faculty alongside reactive approaches (direct responses) and proactive approaches (actions that anticipate racist situations and create programming to encourage anti-racism). The chart focuses on how white people can encourage other white people to be anti-racist in their writing instruction, but we understand that white-to-white action isn't the only means by which to enter this conversation, nor are white-to-white interactions the only contexts where these situations arise. However, we find it to be the most appropriate lens for two white administrators to engage in a short article.

In closing, we hope this situational chart continues WAC and WC faculty-focused work that "knowingly strives to be . . . anti-racist" (Kendi 23), and more closely aligns with Baker-Bell's linguistic justice call. As two white faculty administrators, we understand our responsibility to examine our own "non-racist" behavior and to call other white people to do the same through faculty development work. We are too privileged not to do so.

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Table 1: What does anti-racist WAC and WC faculty development look like among white faculty?

Racist Situation	Anti-Racist Reaction	Proactive Anti-Racist Response
Writing Assignments A faculty member heralds WME in both low- and high-stakes writing activities in a writing-intensive course	Call attention to Baker-Bell's arguments that Black Language is deeply ingrained in POCs' "ways of knowing, interpreting, resisting, and surviving in the world" (34); identify the classroom and writing activities as POC disempowering sites that aren't apolitical, neutral, or defaulted anti-racist.	Discuss the different purposes of low- and high-stakes writing and how to best encourage meaning-making across difference; look at examples of student writing that do not follow WME and their merit; model assignment prompts that encourage students to draw on diverse linguistic competencies and explicitly name them as valuable.
Language Choice A faculty member describes telling a student that they "write with an accent."	Ask the faculty member about how "accents" are both respected and disrespected culturally; discuss with the faculty member how word choice and WME makes its way into the classroom and enacts potential violence.	Invite a panel of writers and/or WC tutors to talk with faculty members about the kinds of teacher comments they (the writers and tutors) have received/seen; the panel could discuss how those comments negatively or positively impact writers of color.
Evaluation/ Assessment A faculty member grades with strict adherence to WME instead of content. Students lose points for using Black, home, native, or first languages.	Discuss Baker-Bell's WME theories, who benefits from them, and why; share an anonymous sample of student writing (with permission) and model how to read linguistic diversity as valuable, while also moving into a rich discussion of the essay's content.	Encourage faculty to write about and share their own worst experiences with writing and with the harshest feedback they have received in order to, in part, dispel the myth of a monolithic WME; discuss how these experiences can help shape writing pedagogy in ways that encourage positive feedback experiences; directly discuss the value of labor-based grading contracts that account for a wider range of experiences with, orientations to, and potential progress in writing.

Racist Situation	Anti-Racist Reaction	Proactive Anti-Racist Response
Peer Work A faculty member runs a peer review workshop without preparing students for the work. As a result, Black students receive primarily sentence-level, correction-style feedback from peers.	Show faculty how to teach students about effective peer review. Create and share documents for these sessions that emphasize higher-order concerns. Encourage dialogue during peer review through which reviewers can ask writers to explain their word choices and decisions. Teach them the strategies of discourse negotiation and encourage a World Englishes approach to clarity and understanding (Matsuda and Matsuda).	Introduce faculty to alternative approaches to peer review that draw on oral traditions, such as the Troika Consulting method, where writers identify a problem or question in their draft, articulate it to peers, and then listen to their peers discuss how the writer might address the problem.

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