Spring 5-22-2021

A Review of Integrated Embodied Therapies and Racial Healing in Public Schools

Grace Fosler
gracefosler@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses

Part of the Disability and Equity in Education Commons, Social Justice Commons, Special Education and Teaching Commons, and the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Recommended Citation

Fosler, Grace, "A Review of Integrated Embodied Therapies and Racial Healing in Public Schools" (2021). *Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses*. 441.
https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/441

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences (GSASS) at DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lesley.edu, cvrattos@lesley.edu.

A Review of Integrated Embodied Therapies and Racial Healing in Public Schools

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

May 2, 2021

Grace Fosler

Expressive Arts Therapy

Sarah Hamil, Ph.D., LCSW, RPT-S, ATR-BC

Abstract

Anti-Black racism lies in the social, political, and economic foundations of the United States of America. Race and racism are manifestations of unhealed generational trauma that negatively impact the minds and bodies of all Americans. Black children are exposed to institutional and interpersonal racism upon entering the public school system, leading many Black students to experience discrimination and segregation, exclusionary discipline, and juvenile entry into the Prison-Industrial Complex. Educators have a unique opportunity to engage in individual and collective racial healing while fostering social change and collective healing in students. An integrated approach of individualized coaching and group embodiment, dance/movement therapy, and drama therapy interventions may provide teachers with an opportunity to improve outcomes for Black students, disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, and encourage communal healing.

Keywords: anti-Black racism, Prison-Industrial Complex, public education, embodied practices, drama therapy, dance/movement therapy, teachers, professional development, anti-racism

A Review of Integrated Embodied Therapies and Racial Healing in Public Schools

Introduction

Teacher teacher, I'm trying to unteach ya

-Jay-Z, *F.U.T.W.*

The United States of America was built on colonization, genocide, and human trafficking (Davison, 2019; Menakem, 2017). European colonists escaped generations of bloody White-on-White violence, which continued and broadened to include other skin tones when they reached the already inhabited North America. Colonists enacted a genocide against Indigenous Americans to steal their land and relied on the free labor of enslaved Africans to build the economy. These truths may cause feelings of discomfort, anger, and shame, denials of responsibility, and refusals to change. When these feelings arise, the cognitive mind cannot effectively process and de-escalate a tense moment (Menakem, 2017). Readers might experience these feelings while reading this thesis, which is both expected and understandable.

Anti-Black racism is ingrained in U.S. institutions, especially the public school system. Students across marginalized groups experience discrimination and abuse in schools. However, this thesis will focus primarily on racism directed at Black individuals and communities. Anti-Blackness in public schools manifests beyond racial segregation and racially motivated interpersonal violence. Microaggressions, school disciplinary policies, and implicit bias in educators are a sampling of areas in which anti-Black racism appears and contributes to the racial trauma experienced by Black students (Krueger-Henney, 2019; Masko & Bloem, 2017; Nadal et al., 2019). The special education population is particularly vulnerable to anti-Black

racism. Black students with disabilities experience a greater risk for exclusionary discipline and future incarceration than their White peers due to school policies, implicit biases, and a lack of teacher training (Loomis et al., 2021). Well-intended educators can inadvertently create further inequity for Black students with segregational placement practices, law enforcement intervention, and a lack of multicultural sensitivity (Fish, 2019).

It is here I must acknowledge my race and experiences. I am a straight-passing, queer, White woman from New England. I live in an exceptionally White state and had few interactions with non-White peers until attending a Catholic high school. In writing and researching this paper, I consciously sought out work created by Black writers, researchers, and artists to anchor this thesis in the lived experiences of Black individuals and communities..

I work in a self-contained special education program for students with emotional disabilities/disturbances. Many of the students I work with have experienced various types of traumas and are sometimes labeled as "bad" by staff, administrators, and students who exist outside of our program. Black children and children of color are disproportionately represented in our program. Students in our program are also likely to have interactions with law enforcement, experience exclusionary discipline, and struggle to find employment after high school. My White colleagues and I participate in ongoing trauma-informed training, reflect and debrief on teacher-student interactions, and frequently discuss multicultural competencies. Yesterday (April 20, 2021), Derrick Chauvin was found guilty of murdering George Floyd in May 2020. I expected the constriction in my chest to release after hearing the guilty verdict, yet the tightness remained. My body understood before my mind that the guilty verdict is a slight note of accountability and not an end to state-sanctioned violence against Black people. My body knew before my brain that there is still much more work to do.

This paper will discuss manifestations of anti-Black racism in historical and contemporary contexts, both in American culture at large and within the microcosms of public schools. Educators have an opportunity to interrupt the racially disparate school-to-prison pipeline and Prison-Industrial Complex, improve school experiences and outcomes for Black students, and engage in individual and communal racial healing and growth. Professional development through an integration of individualized coaching and embodied therapies, including grounding, drama therapy, and dance/movement therapy techniques, are promising interventions for interrupting anti-Black racism in educators while fostering skills in self-reflection, communication, and activism (Cantrick et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2016; Mayor, 2012; Menakem, 2017).

Throughout the research and writing process, I have listened to music by Black artists that highlight Black oppression, Black power, and Black joy. I noted certain songs that call for further artistic reflection on my part. Song lyrics from various Black artists are presented at the beginning of the introduction and subsections in the literature review.

Literature Review

Historical trauma

I ain't a mothafuckin' slave, keep your chains off me

-Vic Mensa, *16 Shots*

Anti-Black racism is an integral part of the U.S. sociocultural landscape (Collins, 2015). The economic success of the early South was dependent on free labor from enslaved peoples. During this period of enslaving Africans, the concept of Whiteness first appeared in written texts, with written records indicating the first appearance of "White" in reference to skin color appeared in the 1680s. Evidence supports that the concept of "White as superior" arose as a

function of wealthy landowners creating a divide between White and Black working class peoples, informing the White workers that their skin tone granted them some sort of exceptionality, and encouraging the disenfranchised, exploited White and Black workers to villainize each other instead of confronting the oppressive landowners (Menakem, 2017).

Banning slavery and slave trading gave rise to anti-Black laws and policies, such as the Jim Crow laws of the Southern states. In addition to state-sanctioned segregation in public settings, racially restrictive real estate covenants became a popular way of preventing property from being sold to Black individuals and families, with the Federal Housing Act created by Franklin Delano Roosevelt praising racially restrictive covenants. Towns could and did seize Black-owned properties under eminent domain as a method of maintaining segregation (Kennedy, 2017).

The federal government eventually ended Jim Crow laws and made room for the most recent form of large-scale Black oppression- mass incarceration. The War on Drugs became official national policy in 1982 under the Reagan administration. The War on Drugs increased funding, training, and equipment for state and local police departments while simultaneously cutting funding for drug prevention and treatment programs. These policies significantly impacted poor people of color, and the prison population increased dramatically in the coming years. Massive prison growth created an opportunity for corporations to open and operate private, for-profit prisons (Hatt, 2011). For-profit prisons are the foundation of the Prison-Industrial Complex, a system in which "prisons and prisoners [are] now more clearly linked to larger economic and political structures and ideologies than to individual conduct and efforts to 'curb' crime" (Davis & Shaylor, 2001, p. 2). Prison has little focus on rehabilitation,

education, and successful reentry to society but instead on economic gains made from exploiting vulnerable individuals.

Forced labor from incarcerated individuals generates the profits for privatized prisons. The 13th Amendment states that enslavement and forced labor are acceptable and legal as long as the individual is being punished for a crime. Since there is an overrepresentation of Black men in the prison population, corporations rely on forced labor from Black men to create their products. They, therefore, have a vested interest in increasing the prison population. Rehabilitative practices have no place in industrialized prison systems as it benefits the Prison-Industrial Complex for individuals to remain in the prison system (Davis & Shaylor, 2001). Incarcerated individuals face loss of rights during and after incarceration and limited options and opportunities due to the "felon" label (Davis & Shaylor, 2001; Hatt, 2011). Mass incarceration is a tool for silencing and exploiting Black men for capitalist gains.

The precursors to incarceration are interactions with law enforcement and, often, police brutality. Police brutality has received more attention recently due to police assaults and shootings of unarmed Black people being filmed and distributed online, as well as the protests after George Floyd's murder and subsequent conviction of Derrick Chauvin in 2021. Police violence is state-sanctioned and legitimized. Footage of the beating of Rodney King and the murder of George Floyd, among many other injustices carried out by law enforcement officers against Black Americans, illuminates the routine nature of police violence against the Black community (Collins, 1998). Angela Davis (2000) wrote

> ...the rapidly expanding prison system, prison architecture, prison surveillance, and
>
> prison system corporatization, prison culture, with all its racist and totalitarian

implications, will continue not only to claim ever-increasing numbers of people of color,

but also to shape social relations more generally in our society (p. 215).

This reshaping of our society to support the Prison-Industrial Complex is evident in

conversations regarding the role, power, and accountability of law enforcement, the prison

pipeline ravaging school systems, and the recent spike of White supremacy in the United States.

White supremacy has re-emerged as a mainstream social issue. The Wall Street Journal

and Rudy Giuliani expressed claims that the election of Barack Obama indicated that the United

States has moved beyond anti-Black racism (Love & Tosolt, 2010). However, after Obama was

elected, a USA Today poll showed that 27% of Americans reported feeling "frightened" by the

election results (Tatum, 2017, p. 50). On November 5, 2008, the day after Obama was elected,

the White supremacist social networking website Stormfront experienced its most significant

increase in membership ever (Tatum, 2017).

White fear contributes significantly to this increase in anti-Black racism (Baggett &

Andrzejewski, 2020). Fear is a trauma response, not a sign of weakness or a defect. Trauma is

the body's survival and protection mechanism to a perceived tangible or intangible threat. Every

body responds to trauma differently, and reflexive trauma responses are held in the body long

after the event occurs, resulting in retained traumatic responses often triggered by events that

remind the body of the original trauma (Menakem, 2017). White fear is a traumatic response to

centuries of generational trauma beginning with extensive White-on-White violence in Europe,

evolving as the myth of race facilitated White-on-Black violence throughout European

colonization and the slave trade, and exacerbated by the increasingly binary sociopolitical

landscape of the current United States (Menakem, 2017; Tatum, 2017).

White fear of Black people appears in the following ways:

- Material- fear of black people taking resources from White people

- Physical- fear of Black people causing bodily harm to White people, especially women

- Rhetorical- fear of being called a racist (Baggett & Andrzejewski, 2020)

The White Americans who supported Obama did not experience the typical material White fear of a Black leader because Obama did not actively seek to challenge the status quo of White supremacy (Love & Tosolt, 2010). Yet other White Americans, presumably part of that 27% of Americans who were "frightened" by Obama's election to office, consciously or unconsciously viewed a Black president as a disruption to the accustomed White victory narrative (Tatum, 2017). The climate of anxiety, fear, and change created by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the uncertainty of the 2008 economic collapse, and a Black man in office contributed to the rise in White supremacy and anti-Blackness in the 21st century, creating space for the alt-right to grow.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (2021) defines the alt-right as "A set of far-right ideologies, groups, and individuals whose core belief is that 'Whtie identity' is under attack by multicultural forces using 'political correctness' and 'social justice' to undermine White people and 'their' civilization." Typical alt-right rhetoric is racist, anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, and anti-feminist. It relies on an "us vs. them" mentality that heightens the sense of fear and threat in followers (Tatum, 2017).

Donald Trump is the "hero" of the alt-right. While Trump did not run for president on an overt anti-Black platform, Trump's inflammatory rhetoric and presidency roused and empowered White supremacists (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2021; Tatum, 2017). A post-election survey from the SPLC (2016) analyzed 867 reports of in-person harassment and intimidation that occurred during the first ten days after Trump's election. Two hundred and

eighty incidents were motivated by xenophobia, one hundred and eighty-seven incidents were motivated by anti-Black racism, and one hundred incidents were motivated by anti-Semitism. Forty incidents occurred in which motive was not clearly stated, yet harassers invoked Trump's name during the incidents. It is worth noting that only twenty-three incidents were motivated by anti-Trump ideology. Most of the reported incidents occurred in public spaces, schools, and workplaces. Several incidents involved unfamiliar adults targeting children with hate speech in public places (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016).

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

> I mean, it's evident that I'm irrelevant to society, that's what you're telling me,
> penitentiary would only hire me

-Kendrick Lamar, *The Blacker the Berry*

Part of the American narrative is the Jeffersonian notion that everyone has an opportunity to pursue their hopes and dreams. This optimistic ideal fails to acknowledge that the Declaration of Independence was written by a slave owner and was initially intended only to protect the rights of White men (Davison, 2020). The Jeffersonian dream of American fulfillment is taught to students of varying racial backgrounds but frequently made inaccessible to Black students. Public schools are an area where many Black children are denied their unalienable rights and treated inequitably from their White peers.

Racial segregation in U.S. public schools remained legal until the Brown v. Board of Education ruling in 1954. The Supreme Court ruled that "...no government in America can unlawfully separate people on account of race" (Kennedy, 2015, p. 83). Contemporary conservative narratives attempt to craft a distorted public memory of the Civil Rights movement, in which conservative White politicians were *not* White supremacists who actively

sought to undermine racial equality (Kennedy, 2015). Yet conservative publication the *National Review* reported in 1956 "[Brown v. Board of Education] was one of the most brazen acts of judicial usurpation in our history" (Kennedy, 2015, p. 78), indicating that conservative Americans at the time likely opposed racial integration and subscribed to White supremacy rhetoric and beliefs.

Much like the Civil War, racial segregation never ceased in the United States. It has simply shifted forms. School populations and demographics are determined by the neighborhoods in which the school serves. Segregation now manifests at an intersection of race and class; wealthy White children go to affluent White schools, poor Black children go to underfunded Black schools. Black students are more likely to attend schools where 60% or more of the population lives in poverty (Tatum, 2017). Schools in impoverished areas have less funding, less teacher training, inadequate library resources, fewer extracurriculars, and outdated facilities, curriculums, and materials than schools in affluent areas (Hatt, 2011). Children living in hypersegregated areas have increased exposure to the traumas associated with poverty while simultaneously being denied the benefits experienced by their more affluent, White, same-age peers (Tatum, 2017, p. 48).

School culture is co-created by the administrators, faculty, and students. Color blindness or not "seeing" race may appear to promote racial equality, yet the color blind practice upholds White supremacy (Collin, 2015). Educators often experience rhetorical White fear- fear of being called a racist- and utilize color blindness as a way of avoiding tense racial moments (Bagget & Andrezejewski, 2020). This well-intentioned approach causes educators to overlook significant aspects of Black students' personal and cultural identities, making students feel unseen and unheard by their teachers (Tatum, 1999). Color blindness also fails to acknowledge the inherent

anti-Black racism in the U.S. and the ever-present impacts of slavery, allowing White educators

to overlook ancestral and contemporary injustices carried out to benefit White supremacy (Love

& Tosolt, 2010).

Microaggressions between students and peers and students and educators have

detrimental impacts on the health of Black students. Sue defines microaggressions as

the brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether

intentional and unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial,

gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group

(Tatum, 2017, p. 52).

A key point here is intentionality. It is irrelevant if a casual comment specific to a Black student

is intentionally hurtful. Microaggressions are cumulative. They weigh on the human body and

spirit, causing physical, emotional, and mental health effects (Tatum, 2015). Microaggressions

add to racial trauma, a collection of symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder but not

recognized in the Diagnostic Manual (Menakem, 2017; Nada et al., 2019). Color blindness itself

is a microaggression. Educators who choose to overlook race contribute to the racial trauma and

overall adverse health outcomes experienced by Black students.

Contemporary social studies curriculums reflect the revisionist conservative narrative of

the Civil Rights era. Civil Rights leaders are sanitized to suit the White narrative. Students are

taught that Rosa Parks was simply a tired old seamstress who would not give up her seat, yet

have to learn on their own that Parks was a dedicated Civil Rights activist who made a

calculated, intentional decision to challenge White supremacy. White America's revisionist

narrative framework is that of the benevolent White savior, the kind government that came to

their senses and *gave* rights to Black Americans. The Black American narrative is of Black

Americans *taking* their rights from White oppressors. White saviorism devalues the resilience, power, and voices of the Black community while praising White America for begrudgingly doing the bare minimum (Kennedy, 2015).

The school-to-prison pipeline is arguably the most violent manifestation of anti-Black racism in the public school system. The simplified explanation of the school-to-prison pipeline is that students, most often Black students, are suspended or expelled (boh forms of exclusionary discipline) from schools over minor infractions, struggle to find employment, and eventually are incarcerated (Hatt, 2011; Smith, 2018). The phenomenon rose from the zero-tolerance national education policy under the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act. The zero-tolerance policy required mandatory expulsions and police referrals for student incidents involving firearms and/or violence. Many states broadened the criteria for exclusionary discipline, allowing educators to permanently remove students from public education for loosely defined problems and disruptive behaviors, including swearing (Hatt, 2011). Suspension for nonviolent incidents is often preceded by a nuanced series of events Vavrus & Cole (2002) call "disciplinary moments." Disciplinary moments resulting in suspension often occur when teachers lack classroom management and emotional regulation skills, multiple students are engaging in disruptive behaviors, and one student, most often a Black student, is singled out for punishment (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). In many cases, the disciplinary moment crystallizes as, "I get mad at you, so I throw you out of school" (Smith, 2018).

Zero-tolerance policies increased police presence and police surveillance of all students, especially Black students, in public schools (Hatt, 2011; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Low-income Black students are often labeled as "bad" and viewed through a conscious or unconscious lens of "badness" by educators, leading to higher rates of suspension and expulsion, resulting in

juvenile entry into the Prison-Industrial Complex (Hatt, 2011). The United States has the

largest prison population globally, numerous corporations with economic interests in

maintaining a large prison population for forced labor, and inequitably funded schools that fail

to provide students with appropriate supports (Davis & Shaylor, 2001; Hatt, 2011).

Zero-tolerance discipline policies continue removing Black youth from schools and into the

Prison-Industrial Complex (Hatt, 2011). Youth who enter the Prison-Industrial Complex will

experience frequent violence, as effective prison functioning relies on the constant threat and

presence of violence (Davis & Shaylor, 2001; Hatt, 2011). Youth who are prosecuted and

sentenced as adults are more likely to experience rape and assault in prison and attempt or die

from suicide (Hatt, 2011).

Special Education

>   I am a black girl who beat the statistics, fuck the opinions and all the logistics
>
>   -Iamdoechii, *Yucky Blucky Fruitcake*

Krueger-Henney (2019) argues that public schools sort students into who is and is not

worthy of an education based on personal and cultural traits, such as physical and intellectual

abilities/disabilities and race. Much like Black adults within the Prison-Industrial Complex,

Black students are disproportionately represented in public school special education programs.

Special education creates a categorical inequality in that special education provides necessary

academic, psychological, emotional, and physical supports, services, and interventions, while

often exacerbating racial inequalities (Fish, 2019).

Anti-Black racism in special education is evident in diagnostic processes. There is

significant subjectivity in special education identification, specifically within educators and

examiners (Frish, 2019). Many educators possess a conscious or unconscious bias in which they

have lower expectations and less tolerance of disruptive behavior from Black students (Hatt, 2011; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Recurrent behavior perceived by educators as "disruptive" can lead to a special education placement. Low-income Black students are more likely to experience incorrect placement into a special education program than their White peers (Hatt, 2011; Vavrus & Cole, 2001).

Fish (2019) sorts disabilities for which students receive special education services into hierarchical groups with racial implications, organized in Table 1:

Table 1

Social Status, Race, and Disability

Disability Status	Diagnoses	Implications
High	Autism spectrum disorders Other health impairment Speech/language deficit	White students more likely to be identified More likely to be identified and receive supports Lower social stigma Increased access to resources More likely to be identified in White students attending minority-majority schools
Stratified	Learning disabilities	Varies- students with access to resources likely to move to a higher status, children of color more likely to lack resources and move to a lower status
Low	Emotional disabilities/disturbance Intellectual disability	Students of color more likely to be identified Greater social stigma

		More likely to be identified in Black students in majority White schools Decreased access to resources

(Fish, 2019)

Table 1 illustrates that Black students have an increased risk of being identified with a low-status disability, such as an emotional disability/disturbance and intellectual disability. This process of placing students in specific programs or academic tracks is referred to as "sorting out" (Fish, 2019). Mixed race schools are more likely to sort out Blak students to lower academic tracks and special education programs (Tatum, 1999). Sorting out Black students manifests as sanctioned and normalized segregation within the school itself, creating a school culture that reflects and reinforces racial stereotypes of Black students being "bad" and less capable than their White peers (Hatt, 2011; Tatum, 1999).

Prisons have evolved into a means of warehousing individuals impacted by poverty and mental illness, with law enforcement officer interaction occurring at the beginning of every incarceration (Davis & Shaylor, 2001). The presence of law enforcement officers in schools (school resource officers) creates an authoritarian and oppressive environment (Smith, 2018). School resources officers wield power to turn a nonviolent disciplinary moment related to mental health into a violent arrest, ensuring early entry of students with disabilities to the Prison-Industrial Complex and the continued commodification of disability (Krueger-Henney, 2019; Smith, 2018).

The presence of law enforcement in schools creates space for police brutality towards children. In 2015, 9th grader Shakara Murphy, a Black student who received special education services, was struggling during an academic lesson. Ms. Murphy's individualized education

plan (IEP), a legally binding document, required mainstream teachers to allow Ms. Murphy to contact her resource room teacher for support when overwhelmed in class. Ms. Murphy requested to access this accommodation in her IEP, but the mainstream teacher denied this request. The overwhelmed Ms. Murphy disengaged with the lesson and put her head down, which the teacher perceived as Ms. Murphy using a device in class, which Ms. Murphy denied. The mainstream teacher told Ms. Murphy to leave the classroom and began writing a disciplinary referral, then called for an administrative escort before Ms. Murphy had an opportunity to leave the room on her own. Ms. Murphy refused to leave the classroom, as she believed she had done nothing wrong, to which the administrator responded by calling for Officer Fields, the school resource officer (Murphy v. Fields, 2019).

Ms. Murphy again refused to leave when prompted by Officer Fields. Officer Fields chose to arrest Murphy for "disturbing schools," despite Fields testifying that Murphy "was only passively resisting by holding on to her desk, and was not a threat to any person or property" (Murphy v. Fields, 2019). Murphy remained in her seat while Officer Fields physically removed the 9th-grade girl from her desk by grabbing her arms, legs, and neck, flipping her and the desk backward onto the ground, pulling on her hands and legs to get her out of the desk, and throwing her onto the floor at the front of the class with her peers watching. Another student was arrested for yelling and swearing during Ms. Murphy's arrest and the assault was recorded on a phone by classmate Nya Kenny (Murphy v. Fields, 2019; Smith, 2019). The case was tried on causes of "negligence/gross negligence by Fields in the manner of his arrest of Plaintiff" and "use of excessive force" (Murphy v. Fields, 2019). The court ruled in favor of Officer Fields (PacerMonitor, 2020). This case will serve as a reference point for intervention applications in the following sections.

Black students are often misdiagnosed and incorrectly tracked into special education programs due to the anti-Blackness upon which the United States was built (Hatt, 2011). Students receiving special education services are at greater risk of police intervention as law enforcement and mass incarceration are now methods of addressing poverty and mental illness (Davis & Shaylor, 2001). Mass incarceration of Black individuals with disabilities, the slave industry of the 21st century, begins in early childhood. Public education systems and educators are responsible for interrupting anti-Blackness in themselves and the institutions they teach.

Teaching for Change

You can make the world better for your kids before you leave it

-J. Cole, *High for Hours*

Public school educators hold a unique opportunity for creating social change in their schools, classrooms, and students (Foster-Shaner et al., 2019). There are small yet significant ways schools and educators can promote diversity and inclusivity, such as seeking faculty, curriculum, and materials that provide positive representations of varying student identities (Tatum, 1999). Yet creating sustainable social change and challenging anti-Black racism requires more than multicultural representation. Author and historian Jon Meacham proposes a recipe for anti-racism work that extends into the formula for effective education: curiosity, humility, and empathy (Davison, 2019). These characteristics are essential attitudes for the individual and collective healing that must occur within the bodies of educators seeking to interrupt anti-Black racism and improve the outcomes for all students, but especially Black students (Gregory et al., 2016; Mayor, 2012; Menakem, 2017).

Professional development is necessary to train educators in any type of new practice. Yet, the current professional development model- which often occurs sporadically and without

ongoing training- is not an effective method for creating change and growth on a day-to-day

basis (Gregory et al., 2016). Individualized coaching programs, such as My Teaching Partner,

offer a more impactful and lasting approach to reducing racial disparities in exclusionary

discipline (Gregory et al. 2016, Loomis et al., 2021). Gregory et al. (2016) conducted a

three-year study using My Teaching Partner Secondary (MTP-S) with a sample of educators at a

secondary school and a control group of teachers receiving no coaching. Coaching methods

involved personalized feedback through video correspondence, encouraging educator

self-reflection, and developing action plans to implement desired teacher behaviors, all of which

create a positive classroom environment (Gregory et al., 2016). Classroom interventions

included focusing on the quality of teacher-student interactions, creating a positive and

challenging learning environment, and supporting students' social-emotional and academic

needs. Gregory et al. (2016) hypothesized that positive relationships between teachers and

students could prevent misunderstandings involving implicit bias and mutual racial distrust.

Improved relationships increase trust between teachers and students, creating space for

understanding, problem-solving, and growth, leading to fewer disciplinary referrals for Black

students (Gregory et al., 2016).

The study outcomes indicated links between positive teacher-student relations,

highly-stimulating instruction, and positive student behavior. Evidence showed that Black

students, who often experience lower expectations from their teachers, may be more likely to

engage in advanced and creative problem-solving in a cognitively challenging environment.

Teacher behaviors, such as increased responsiveness and sensitivity to student needs and

fostering high-level cognitive processes, resulted in racially equitable and fewer disciplinary

referrals (Gregory et al., 2016). If Shakara Murphy's mainstream teacher had training around

teacher responsiveness and sensitivity, perhaps he could have supported Shakara through her academic challenge instead of getting her arrested. Proper implementation of MTP-S can improve outcomes for all students while providing additional targeted support for marginalized and vulnerable students (Gregory et al., 2016).

Embodied Healing

>You can take my wings but I'm still goin' fly, and even when you edit me the booty don't lie
>
>   -Janelle Monáe, *Q.U.E.E.N.*

Racism is a form of trauma and trauma is a full-body experience. Often, the body holds a lasting physical memory of a trauma that the cognitive mind cannot recall. Studies indicate that unprocessed trauma is retained in the body and alters DNA, passing the unresolved pain and suffering into the genetic information of the next generation in a variety of manifestations. Racial trauma is a form of generational trauma that inhabits Black and White bodies alike (Menakem, 2017). Trauma is most effectively healed through the body and racial trauma is no exception; embodied practices and encounters process and heal ancestral wounds while creating space for growth (Mayor, 2012; Menakem, 2017). Body-based self-regulation, drama therapy, and dance/movement therapy techniques are effective embodied practices for collectively and individually challenging anti-Black racism in education (Cantrick et al.; 2018; Mayor, 2012; Menakem, 2017).

As Gregory et al. (2016) emphasized in the MTP-S study, the teacher sets the tone for a positive or negative classroom environment. An emotionally dysregulated teacher cannot emotionally regulate their students. The same notion extends to healing- a dysregulated body cannot effectively work through trauma or support trauma processing in others (Menakem,

2017). Settled and calm bodies are necessary for connection and communal healing. Menakem (2017) provides a variety of simple grounding activities- including humming, deep breathing, rocking, and guided meditations- intended to relax and calm the body. Teachers could practice these grounding exercises alone or as a collaborative practice with the entire classroom with appropriate training. Cultivating grounding techniques while at baseline trains the body and mind to access said strategies during moments of tension and confrontation (Menakem, 2017). Settled bodies are more capable of navigating discomfort that often escalates and leads to disciplinary moments in school settings.

Dance/movement therapy (D/MT) provides educators with an opportunity to explore the bodily manifestations of oppression. One function of the body is communicating submission and dominance, both consciously and unconsciously. The historical section of this paper detailed how White bodies have violently dominated Black bodies since the colonization of the United States (Cantrick et al., 2018). Trauma remains in the bodies of oppressed peoples and within the body of oppressors. Committing and/or witnessing violent acts are a form of secondary trauma that harms the bodies and minds of perpetrators and bystanders, allowing the cycle of racial violence to continue (Menakem, 2017).

D/MT interventions focusing on embodied experiences and nonverbal communication could potentially help educators understand their own racial trauma, as well as the traumas of their students and colleagues (Cantrick et al., 2018). Nonverbal communication- body positioning, gestures, facial expressions, touch, eye contact, body proximity, object relations- is critical to teacher-student relationships and the classroom environment (Ali, 2011; Canrick et al., 2018). Evidence indicates that over half of all communication is nonverbal, possibly even two-thirds or more (Ali, 2011). Nonverbal communication in the classroom conveys power

dynamics and dominance (Cantrick et al., 2018). Interventions that invite teachers to witness and understand their own oppressive patterns of nonverbal communication create opportunities for transformation and change.

Shakara Murphy's body language of putting her head down expressed her disengagement with the mainstream lesson. Had her mainstream teacher interpreted this nonverbal communication as a sign of overwhelm instead of a sign of defiance, he may have more effectively managed the situation before calling for law enforcement intervention. The mainstream teacher could have waited until after class to address Ms. Murphy's disengagement, spoke to her privately during a moment that did not require group instruction, or simply followed the accommodations detailed in Ms. Murphy's IEP. Officer Fields testified noticing the passive resistance in Ms. Murphy's body. While Officer Fields acknowledged Murphy's nonverbal communication more so than the mainstream teacher, he chose to physically dominate and arrest a Black child in front of her classmates.

Our understanding of race is a manufactured creation that humans perform through their bodies and relationships (Mayor, 2012; Menakem, 1017). Performance itself is transformative. Viewing race and racism through a performative lens creates a space for racial healing and change (Mayor, 2012). Developmental transformation (DvT) and Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) are drama therapy methods that facilitate embodied experiences around race and oppression while inviting playfulness, creativity, and growth (Foster-Shaner et al., 2019; Mayor, 2012).

Mayor (2012) states, "DvT's practice of playing with the unplayable offers perhaps the strongest framework for disrupting race" (p. 216). DvT is a facilitated free play drama therapy technique in which participants play out scenes that highlight transformation, encounter, and the body (Mayor, 2012, p. 216). DvT procedures include establishing a playspace, safety

considerations, communication, and mutual understandings around restraint. Professional

development sessions that involved DvT role plays around school discipline and race could

allow teachers to explore and play with their roles in the public school system, challenge

implicit biases, and change understandings of race (Mayor, 2012).

Foster-Shaner et al. (2019) led a one-day TO workshop with a group of educators. The

workshop centered around three critical elements of TO:

the ways in which the exercises enable embodied experiences and analysis of systems

and our individual locations within them; the importance of learning in community; and

the use of play and joyful, creative risk-taking to discuss and reflect on serious topics

related to systemic oppression (Foster-Shaner et al., 2019).

The workshop leaders hypothesized that, similar to Menakem's (2017) point about calm bodies

calming other bodies, teachers must confront the roles they play in systemic oppression to foster

social change in their students and school communities (Foster-Shaner et al., 2019).

The TO workshop consisted of six activities, four of which are highlighted. The leaders

began with a series of warm-up exercises that encouraged creative risk-taking, trust-building,

and movement (Foster-Shaner et al., 2019). The leaders utilized several TO activities that

prompted rich group discussion and problem-solving. The Columbian Hypnosis exercise is a

group activity that explored power dynamics through physical control and space, which led to a

group discussion around power dynamics within the classrooms. The Image Theater exercise

invited group members to create living tableaus based on prompts regarding the ideals and

realities of the education system. Group members discussed the intentions of educators, the

goals of education, and increased awareness around problem behaviors in themselves and

creating action steps for change. The Marcher and The Dancer/Forum Theater is an embodied

activity involving a group of marchers and a lone dancer, which allowed group members to explore the tensions of upholding an oppressive system while simultaneously trying to change the system from the inside (Foster-Shaner et al., 2019).

Had Ms. Murphy's mainstream teacher participated in this TO workshop and had an opportunity to reflect on his roles, goals, and realities as an educator, he may have paused before calling her out in front of the class, before removing her from his class after denying her IEP accommodations, before calling an administrator, and before calling a school resource officer who assaulted and arrested Murphy for putting her head down in class.

Discussion

Limitations and Considerations

Access to evidence-based, integrative embodied therapy programs that target anti-racist training in educators is a barrier. There were few resources, aside from the articles already referenced, available through the Lesley University academic database, indicating a significant amount of research needed on the topic. There are also the costs of hosting a workshop, finding time in teachers' extremely full schedules, and the current Covid-19 restrictions that make this work less readily accessible.

It is essential to consider whether an intervention system is an equity implicit or explicit model, meaning does the program actively state its goals as "reducing historical disparities" or is the racial equity a positive secondary effect (Gregory et al., 2016, p. 175)? MTP-S is an equity implicit program in that its goal is to "improve the quality of interactions across all students" (Gregory et al., 2016, p.186). Equity implicit programs support improving baseline teacher practices, whereas equity explicit programs target interactions between teachers and students from racialized groups (Gregory et al., 2016).

Embodied practices such as drama therapy and D/MT are effective and creative ways to facilitate racial healing and change, yet there are risks and precautions to acknowledge. Performance is a high-risk activity that may elicit discomfort and resistance in group participants, which unsettles bodies and inhibits healing (Mayor, 2012; Menakem, 2017). Informed consent regarding group activities, expectations, and guiding theories should be clear if educators participated in such a workshop. Facilitators of embodied and racial healing activities must understand the need for psychological first aid and debriefing for both facilitators and group participants (Foster-Shaner et al., 2019; Menakem, 2017).

Future Research

There is a lack of research surrounding embodied therapies and anti-racism practices. There is even less research at the intersection of embodied therapies, anti-racism practices, and professional development for educators. However, there is an opportunity for arts-based research on the role of embodied anti-racism practices used in conjunction with the individualized coaching professional development model. I have devised a potential arts-based research method, which includes a sample curriculum for a 9-month anti-racism program for educators developed from integrating the embodied practices and personalized coaching practices detailed in the literature review.

Table 2

Sample Curriculum for Anti-Racism Workshops

September Workshop	Introductions, devise group mission, develop group norms and contract, grounding exercises
October Workshop	Racial trauma, complex trauma, generational trauma, and secondary trauma

November Workshop	Introduction to embodied therapies, understanding embodied trauma
December Workshop	Trauma-informed teaching practices, school discipline, overview of the prison pipeline
January Workshop	D/MT and challenging embodied oppression
February Workshop	TO and creating change
March Workshop	Embodied activism in the classroom
April Workshop	Create personal and community goals, action plans for challenging racism post-workshop
May Workshops	Group termination, takeaways, goodbyes

The program would include a monthly in-person workshop and bi-weekly individual coaching for group participants via video correspondence. Group workshops would occur in ninety-minute sessions and personal coaching in hour-long sessions. Group size should range from seven to ten education staff participants. A diverse group of three to four facilitators with varying specialties is ideal, ensuring multiple perspectives from different identity intersections and providing adequate individual interventions. Below is a sample outline for a group workshop:

- October Workshop:
  - Topics: Racial trauma, complex trauma, generational trauma, and secondary trauma
  - Warm-up (5 minutes)
    - Invite group to participate in a collective grounding activity

- ■ Build a "rainstorm" as a group using claps, snaps, and other percussive hand movements. One leader starts the activity and the group follows in succession. The leader can change their movement at any time, challenging the group members to watch and listen closely.

- ■ Objectives: active listening, group cohesion, attunement, fostering creativity, embodiment, grounding, creating a container, inviting playfulness (Knill et al., 2005; Mayor, 2012; Yalom & Leszcz, 2008)

- ○ Lecture (30 minutes)

  - ■ Multimedia (written slides, photographs, music, movies, video clips) presentation regarding racial trauma, complex trauma, generational trauma, and secondary trauma, led by facilitators

  - ■ Encourage group participants to hold their questions for the discussion portion

  - ■ Objectives: multi-sensory integration of information, understanding for various types of trauma and impacts (Menakem, 2012)

- ○ Discussion (20 minutes)

  - ■ Opportunity for participants to ask questions

  - ■ Depending on group dynamics, facilitators may use guiding questions

  - ■ Objectives: synthesize lecture information, encourage individual and group reflection, opportunity for clarifications and questions, establishing connections between lecture and experiential

- ○ Experiential (25 minutes)

- ■ Adaptation of Meneaken's (2017) "invite the presence of an ancestor" practice (p. 53)

- ■ Facilitator leads guided visualization for group members to "invite" an ancestor using Menakem's (2017) prompts

- ■ After guided visualization is complete, create an intermodal experience by inviting participants to create an artistic representation of their ancestor

- ■ Option to introduce ancestor to group via artistic representation

- ■ Objectives: embodiment, grounding, playfulness, personal inquiry and reflection, curiosity about family history and roles in history, consideration of own race and ethnicity, opportunity for crystallization through intermodality (Knill et al., 2005; Mayor, 2012; Menakem, 2017)

- ○ Debrief (10 minutes)

  - ■ Facilitated group discussion about what felt positive, what felt difficult, next steps, and self-care

  - ■ Objective: psychological safety, closure, group cohesion, resource cultivation (Foster-Shaner et al., 2019; Menakem, 2017; Yalom & Lesczc, 2008)

Individual coaching sessions integrated with group workshops will allow group participants to develop personalized goals based on their journeys, skills, and experiences. Individual sessions will also provide participants with opportunities to more fully process content and experientials from workshops and support participants in bridging embodied anti-racism practices into their day-to-day lives (Gregory et al., 2016).

Information gathered through the integration of qualitative, quantitative, and arts-based research methods would best serve a multi-modal study of this type. Potential methods include entry and exit surveys for participants, assessing implicit bias, participant art reflections, individual participant interviews, student surveys and interviews in regards to school climate, culture, and relationships with teachers, and analysis of school disciplinary data pre and post-study. A study of this kind could determine the effectiveness and shortcomings of the integrated approach of embodied group therapies and individual coaching sessions regarding the role of educators in upholding and challenging anti-Black racism in public education.

Moving Forward

Black individuals and communities are not responsible for creating racial change in White Americans. White individuals and communities bear the burden of challenging their own privileges, implicit biases, and roles in maintaining oppressive systems. Confronting anti-Black racism and embodied racial trauma are profoundly uncomfortable and sometimes painful topics that can elicit varied trauma responses, including shame, fear, and despair (Menakem, 2017). To create lasting social change, White Americans must embrace the discomfort and work through the pain of the generational trauma that has given rise to the modern United States of America.

Public school educators exist at a unique intersection of individual and community healing. Through acknowledging and challenging their own histories, values, and behaviors, educators have the opportunity to engage in meaningful anti-racism work on individual and peer levels. Embodied practices, drama therapy, and D/MT encourage body-based activism and self-reflection through a playful and creative lens. Teachers can bring their developing anti-racism practices to their classrooms, improving relationships with and outcomes for Black

students, fostering an inclusive classroom culture, and disrupting the racially disparate practice

of exclusionary discipline.

References

Ali, S. M. (2011). The use of non-verbal communication in the classroom. 1st National

    Conference on Foreign Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics.

    https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/153447323.pdf

Baggett, H. C., & Andrzejewski, C. E. (2019). An exploration of White fear and school

    discipline. Alabama. *Whiteness and Education*, *5*(1), 74-90.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/23793406.2019.1697964

Cantrick, M., Anderson, T., Lucia, B. L., & Warning, M. (2018). Embodying activism:

    Reconciling injustice through dance/movement therapy. *American Journal of Dance*

    Therapy, 40(2), 191-201.

    http://dx.doi.org.ezproxyles.flo.org/10.1007/s10465-018-9288-2

Carter, S., Mosley, T. & Harmon, J. (2013) F.U.T.W. [Song Recorded by Jay-Z] On *Magna*

    Carta Holy Grail. Roc-A-Fella.

Cole, J. (2017) High for hours. [Song recorded by J. Cole]. Single. Dreamville.

Collins, P.H. (1998). The tie that binds: Race, gender, and US Violence.*Ethnic and Racial*

    Studies, 21(5), 917-938. https://doi.org/10.1080/014198798329720

Collins, P. H. (2015). Science, critical race theory, and colour-blindness. *British Journal of*

    Sociology, *66*(1), 46-52. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12117

Davis, A. Y., & Rodriguez, D. (2000). The challenge of prison abolition: A conversation.

    Social Justice, 27(3), 212-218. https://www.jstor.org/stable/29767244

Davis, A.Y. & Shaylor, C. (2001). Race, gender, and the Prison Industrial Complex: California

    and beyond. *Meridians*. Duke University Press.

Davison, K.D. (2020). *The soul of America.* HBO.

Duckworth, K. (2015) The blacker the berry. [Song by Kendrick Lamar]. On *To pimp a butterfly.* Topdog, Aftermath, & Interscope.

Fish, R. (2019). Standing out and sorting in: Exploring the role of racial composition in racial disparities in special education. *American Educational Research Journal*, *56*(6), 2573-2608. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/n6fgp

Foster-Shaner, L., Sondel, B., Generett, G., & King, M. (2019). Living and learning at the intersections of identity and community: facilitating Theatre of the Oppressed workshops with educators. *The Educational Forum, 83(4*), 351-364. DOI: 10.1080/00131725.2019.1625473

Gregory, A., Hafen, C. A., Ruzek, E., Mikami, A. Y., Allen, J. P., & Pianta, R. C. (2016). Closing the racial discipline gap in classrooms by changing teacher practice. *School Psychology Review, 45(2)*, 171-191.

Hatt, B. (2011). Still I rise: youth caught between the worlds of schools and P\prisons. *The Urban Review, 43*(4), 476-490. http://dx.doi.org.ezproxyles.flo.org/10.1007/s11256-011-0185-y

Iamdoechii. (2020). Yucky blucky fruitcake. [Song recorded by Iamdoechii]. On *Oh the places you'll go.* Doechii.

Kennedy, R. L. (2015) The Civil Rights Movement and the politics of memory. *The American Prospect.*

Kennedy, R. (2017). State-enforced segregation and the color of justice. *The American Prospect*, *28*(3), 85-88.

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A500500161/AONE?u=les_main&sid=AONE&xid=657
d8830

Knill, P. J., Levine, E. G., & Levine, S. K. (2005). Principles and practice of expressive arts
therapy : toward a therapeutic aesthetics. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Krueger-Henney, P. (2019). Through space into the flesh: Mapping inscriptions of anti-Black
racist and ableist schooling on young people's bodies. *Curriculum Inquiry, 49(4),*
426-441. https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2019.1657770

Loomis, A., Davis, A., Cruden, G., Padilla, C., & Drazen, Y. (2021). Early Childhood
Suspension and Expulsion: A Content Analysis of State Legislation. Early Childhood
Education Journal, 1. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01159-4

Love, B. L., & Tosolt, B. (2010). Reality or rhetoric? Barack Obama and post-racial America.
Race, Gender & Class, 17(3), 19-37.
https://ezproxyles.flo.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxyles.flo.org/schola
rly-journals/reality-rhetoric-barack-obama-post-racial-america/docview/762223638/se-2
?accountid=12060

Masko, A. L., & Bloem, P. L. (2017). Teaching for equity in the milieu of white fragility: Can
children's literature build empathy and break down resistance? *Curriculum and Teaching
Dialogue*, *19*(1-2), 55-67.
https://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=10&sid=b3865443-ecde-4d23
-91dc-b74ad8da3244@pdc-v-sessmgr03

Mayor, C. (2012) Playing with race: A theoretical framework and approach for creative arts

therapists. *The Arts in Psychotherapy, 39(3),* 214-219.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2011.12.008

Menakem, R. (2017). *My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to*

mending our hearts and bodies. Central Recovery Press.

Mensa, V. (2016). 16 shots. [Song recorded by Vic Mensa]. There's *a lot going on.* Roc Nation

& Def Jam.

Murphy v. Fields, Civil Action No. 3:17-cv-2914-CMC (D.S.C. Oct. 23, 2019)

Nadal, K. L., Erazo, T., & King, R. (2019). Challenging definitions of psychological trauma:

Connecting racial microaggressions and traumatic stress. *Journal for Social Action in*

Counseling & Psychology, *11*(2), 2-16. https://doi.org/10.33043/jsacp.11.2.2-16

PacerMonitor. (2020). *Murphy v. Fields et al. (3:17-CV-02914), South Carolina district court.*

PacerMonitor Federal Court Case Tools.

https://www.pacermonitor.com/public/case/22863806/Murphy_v_Fields_et_al

Robinson, J.M., Irvin, R.G., Irvin III, N., Joseph II, C. (2014). Q.U.E.EN.. [Song recorded by

Janelle Monáe.] On *The Electric Lady.* Wondaland Arts Society.

Smith, A.D. (2018) *Notes from the field.* HBO.

Southern Poverty Law Center. (2016). Ten days after: Harassment and intimidation in the

aftermath of the election. Southern Poverty Law Center.

https://www.splcenter.org/20161129/ten-days-after-harassment-and-intimidation-afterma

th-election

Southern Poverty Law Center. (2021). Alt-right. Southern Poverty Law Center.

https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/alt-right

Tatum, B. D. (1999). Color blind or color conscious? *School Administrator, 56*(5), 28.

https://ezproxyles.flo.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxyles.flo.org/trade-journals/color-blind-conscious/docview/219278285/se-2?accountid=12060

Tatum, B. D. (2017). "Why are all the Black kids still sitting together in the cafeteria?": and other conversations about race in the twenty-first century. *Liberal Education, 103(3–4), 46.*

Vavrus, F., & Cole, K. (2002). "I didn't do nothin'": The discursive construction of school suspension. *The Urban Review*, *34*(2), 87-111.

Yalom, I. D., & Leszcz, M. (2008). The theory and practice of group psychotherapy. Basic Books.

THESIS APPROVAL FORM

Lesley University
Graduate School of Arts & Social Sciences
Expressive Therapies Division
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Art Therapy, MA

Student's Name: __Grace Fosler_____

Type of Project: Thesis

Title: ___A Review of Integrated Embodied Therapies and Racial Healing in Public
Schools_____

Date of Graduation: ____May 2021_____

In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor:__ Sarah Hamil, Ph.D., LCSW, RPT-S, ATR-BC_____ _____