

Composition Forum 46, Spring 2021
<http://compositionforum.com/issue/46/>

Review of Frankie Condon and Vershawn Ashanti Young's *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*

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Condon, Frankie and Vershawn Ashanti Young, editors. *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*. The WAC Clearinghouse, 2017. 237pp.

Instances of racial discrimination and inequality are being discussed in the public forum and are no longer seen as only institutional and obscure, but as instances that are so intertwined with the everyday experience. Universities are seeing the need for these discussions in the academic space. Cal State University has now required its students to complete an ethnic studies or social justice course in order to graduate.

CSU Chancellor Timothy P. White explained that the new requirement “will empower our students to meet this moment in our nation's history, giving them the knowledge, broad perspectives and skills needed to solve society's most pressing problems” (qtd In Silva). According to White, CSU moved forward with this decision in order to “connect...with the voices and perspectives of other historically oppressed groups, and advances the field by applying the lens of social justice” (qtd In Silva). This historical precedent is a result of a transformative racial climate and the much needed progress that is to be taken.

If this decision can be made by one of the largest university systems in the country, how much more pressing is it for other academic institutions to take these types of progressive steps? Academic institutions should consider their teaching methods and learning objectives to help its students understand these voices and perspectives, in a similar manner that the world has been prompted to. If there is an academic responsibility to educate students to be prepared for the issues that surround them, these discussions on race should be integral to their learning.

While individuals all share an equal responsibility to learn about the concepts of race and how they see themselves in the larger discussion, educators have a responsibility to provide a space for the discussion of race, and to allow both themselves and their students to be a part of it. While the fear of discussing race in the public space has been progressively eroding, that should look the same in the academic space.

Performing Antiracist Pedagogy begins with a bold call-to-action by Diab et al. in “Making Commitments to Racial Justice Actionable.” Instructors and writing program administrators should not simply lament the state of the culture and its effects on the lives and perspectives of students without doing something about it. They claim that “because racism is institutional, we believe that a significant part of making commitments actionable must happen within the institutions we occupy and shape” (Diab et al. 35).

Diab et al. caution against an uncomfortability of writing programs to feel different and ostracized from other writing programs. They explain that the “willingness to listen and to be disturbed makes us develop ways to resist how these micro manifestations of aggressions and inequities recycle their ever-present historical legacies” (26).

Ushering in social progress within the writing classroom involves more than just an external view at what needs to be changed, but rather instructors need to look within themselves and understand their own preconceived notions in the classroom. Diab et al. emphasize the development of emotional intelligence to handle difficult or uncomfortable topics that are addressed in the writing classroom.

“Teaching African American Discourse” brings in a discussion from a former segregationist, Calvin M. Logue, who discusses how the early development of a course he taught, entitled “Black Rhetoric,” evolved in the 1970s. His methods of role playing in the classroom allowed students to view various perspectives. This chapter includes a narration of his personal experiences as a segregationist and how his experiences shaped his understanding of the need to implement antiracist pedagogy in the classroom. This chapter illustrates the effectiveness of this method in order to indirectly motivate racial discussion and openness in the writing classroom.

In her chapter “A Plea for Critical Race Theory Counterstory,” Aja Y. Martinez speaks about a need for the intervention of “master narratives” to be done by the marginalized people it acknowledges. She argues that the writing classroom is a place for “voices from the margins to become the voices of authority in the researching and relating of [their] own experiences” (65). However, due to the statistically low chances of marginalized populations to access the research opportunities that scholarship provides, many of these populations’ voices remain unheard and further marginalized. She makes the poignant example that because the statistics are low for an individual of the Latinx community to ever enroll in a doctoral program which would allow them to perform and contribute to research, their own voices will continue to be marginalized within the academic community.

The authors of *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy* continue to grapple with the idea that antiracist pedagogy has little valuable place in the writing classroom. Mya Poe addresses the trepidation of Writing Across the Curriculum workshops in implementing antiracist pedagogy in “Reframing Race in Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum”. She points out that it is important for instructors to understand the objectives of the writing classroom and for them not to see “race as an added complexity to WAC workshops” (98). Instead, they must learn how aspects of the WAC objectives apply to race and how antiracist pedagogy can serve to meet those needs.

Section Two of *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy* focuses on the identities of those in the writing classroom. This includes both the instructor and the students. When instructors are able to be conscious of the needs and diverse experiences of the students, they can embrace antiracist pedagogy with empathy and conscientiousness. Pimentel et. al in their chapter “The Myth of Colorblind Writing” take it a step further by examining how conscientious approaches to race have been implemented in the writing classroom. They take their observations a step further by addressing a need for instructors to consider their own biases and predispositions when implementing antiracist pedagogy. Parker in his chapter “Writing and Unwriting Race” gives pertinent examples of writing and critical reading exercises that he assigns to his students to examine race and its constructs through the multicultural literature that he presents in his classroom.

The authors in *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication* provide detailed examples and arguments that not only defend the implementation of antiracist pedagogy in the writing classroom, but reassure the concerned faculty member and program administrator that the pedagogy does have a place in the writing classroom. Course objectives and WAC programs will not suffer, but will be enriched and appropriate to the times that society is confronted with outside of the classroom. This text serves as a call to writing instruction to not to be afraid, but to boldly approach antiracist pedagogy for the necessary tool that it is.

Works Cited

Condon, Frankie and Vershawn Ashanti Young, editors. *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*. The WAC Clearinghouse, 2017. <https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/books/antiracist/pedagogy.pdf> [<https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/books/antiracist/pedagogy.pdf>].

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"Review of Condon and Young, PERFORMING ANTIRACIST PEDAGOGY" from *Composition Forum* 46 (Spring 2021)

Online at: <http://compositionforum.com/issue/46/bain-condon-young-review.php>

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