At Embracing Equity, we know that teachers and students in anti-racist environments have higher levels of success and retention in school and beyond. That’s why our organization exists. Embracing Equity offers data-backed coaching that brings approachable anti-racist practices to organizational leaders. We are not a Diversity Equity Inclusion shop that swoops in with a streamlined, watered-down list of best practices and then leaves. That’s because we know this is a journey that’s not meant to be taken alone. Instead, we walk hand-in-hand with education leaders to guide them in deconstructing the traditional narrative of education. We work with them until they have established a reflective, action-driven foundation to address inequalities and are equipped to carry on the work without our side-by-side guidance. We believe that educators have the power to transform society. Embracing Equity strategically builds the capacity, skills, and knowledge necessary to sustain our efforts for a just and equitable society.

**How Does Anti-Racism Connect with Dual Language Education?**

Human beings interpret the world, experiences, and one another through language, the bedrock of humanity, and carry it through generations upon generations. Language is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. We use language to define ourselves and others. When language is lost, a community’s shared method of communication is interrupted and the culture that it reflects disappears. There are countless examples of this loss from around the world.

The Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong’o argues, colonialism’s most powerful weapon against a community’s identity is, what he calls, the “cultural bomb.” He writes, “the effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities, and ultimately in themselves” (1986). What he’s saying here is that if you want to colonize people, you must do so through language. Language is an incredible force in shaping and is shaped by our thinking, our relationships, our cultures, and our beliefs. This same argument can also be applied to the language and culture of the movement of racial and social justice. When we are not taught the language to describe oppressive experiences or conditions, we don’t have the language for collective defiance.

Dual language education’s foundation is made up of three pillars: Bilingualism and Biliteracy, High Academic Achievement, and Sociocultural Competency. These pillars reflect dual language’s focus on validating, supporting, and developing students’ skills using two languages academically and socially. Recently, a fourth pillar has been proposed: Developing Critical Consciousness (Palmer, D., Cervantes-Soon, C., Dorner, L. & Heiman, D, 2019). This proposed pillar recognizes the unequal world in which our students live and offers support in recognizing the oppression that exists, supporting them in ongoing dialogue in order to break down the power structures and myths that have allowed this inequality to exist, and take action to confront it.

It is critical that we develop shared language to dissect, analyze, identify, dismantle, and transform...
education’s inequitable systems. Critical to that process is the ability to shift from intellectualizing other people’s definitions of key words like race, racism, and equity, to making meaning and internalizing these concepts for ourselves.

**Defining Race, Racism, Equity, and Anti-Racism**

You do not come into this world African or European or Asian; rather, this world comes into you. As hundreds of scientists have argued, you are not born with a race in the same way you are born with fingers, eyes, and hair. Fingers, eyes, and hair are natural creations, whereas race is a social fabrication. We define race as a symbolic category, based on phenotype or ancestry and constructed according to specific social and historical contexts, that is misrecognized as a natural category. At Embracing Equity, we define race as a political construct created to concentrate power with white people and legitimize dominance over non-white people. Racism is an individual, cultural, institutional, and systemic way by which differential consequences are created, where groups historically or currently defined as white are advantaged, and groups historically or currently defined as not white (African, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, etc.) as disadvantaged.

Understanding how race and racism are used to create inequitable outcomes is critical to getting to equity. It’s a foundational step of practicing anti-racism. In Ijeoma Oluo’s words, “The beauty of anti racism is that you don’t have to pretend to be free of racism to be an antiracist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself. And it’s the only way forward” (2018). It has been my surest path toward a world where every child is affirmed in their full, beautiful, complicated humanity.

We are the dreamers, the heroes, the teachers who are creating this world. Let’s carry that brave, anti-racist spirit in us and use our shared vocabulary of defiance to guide us in our anti-racist learning.

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References


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**Calling all New Mexico Teachers!**

Embracing Equity is in its first year of a statewide, cohort-based experiential learning program to create equitable outcomes for students in New Mexico at no cost to participants, thanks to support from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation®. To register and join hundreds of community stakeholders already involved in this unified movement, please visit embracingequity.org/nm-cohorts/embracing-equity-cohort.