
Infusing the Cardinal Virtues of Courage and Justice in Professional Development (PD) Programs with the Aim of Dismantling Racism: A Theoretical Investigation into How Character Education (CE) Might Aid in the Promotion of Human Flourishing

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Race is a construct not rooted in science (Smedley, 1997). Creditable geneticists will eschew any notion of race, as it is a myth that has plagued the globe since the mid seventeenth century. The idea of race has evolved over the past few centuries. Starting in the early seventeenth century, it was a tool to define class or status. Some scholars opine the etymology of race is from the word Raza which means root (El-Kati, 2014). Historically ethnicity was not correlated with the construct of race (Fredrickson, 2003). However, with the expansion of the transatlantic slave trade, the concept of race metastasized into an instrument to justify the enslavement of non-whites. Before the pseudo-science of eugenics, so-called natural philosophers such as Gregor Mendel and Carl Linnaeus envisaged categorizing humans based on arbitrary physical traits. In essence, Europeans ferreted for empirical and rational excuses for the diminution of souls.

Although race is an illusion, the impact it imposes on non-white communities is tangible and comprehensive in nature (Wilkerson, 2020). As such, this article aims to present a framework by which higher education can suffuse the virtues of courage and justice into annual Professional Development (PD) programs in order to minimize the negative effects of racism. In doing so, the article will first explore the contours of racism. The second section argues that racism is counterproductive in the pursuit of higher learning. The third portion of the article will examine the cardinal virtues of courage and justice, particularly how these virtues can support flourishing learning environments. Finally, the author proposes a three-part (PD) session that is designed to equip faculty, staff, and administration with the tools to address the pernicious effects of racism.

Racism

Race serves as the substrate for racism. Racism is the confluence of racial prejudice and power. It is the systemic and systematic disenfranchisement of individuals based on the illusion of race (El-Kati, 2014). This definition may appear nonsensical given the author has already alluded to the myth of race. Hence, the conundrum. How can racism be built on the foundation of a fabricated concept? Other scholars also struggle with the enigma (Fields & Fields, 2014). Despite this conundrum, society attempts to classify people based on physical and phenotypical traits that have no scientific nor rational basis. This is clearly illustrated in the famous doll test of the 1940s. Young children, both Black and White were asked to determine the moral and aesthetic value of toy dolls. Inevitably, the White dolls were deemed to be smart and attractive, while the Black dolls were regulated to a lesser status. Unfortunately, the findings have remained consistent for the past 80 years.

This false ideology of race is easily exploited in order to justify the physical, emotional, economic and psychological brutality toward those of Alkebulan descent (Oluo, 2018). Granted, racism negatively affects numerous ethnic groups, however, the past four centuries have constructed a pseudo-Manichaeism world in which there are people of color and there are Whites. To that end, the further someone is perceived from White, the greater the degree of racial prejudice. Thus, racism is the excuse that allows those in positions of power to assuage the cognitive dissonances associated with harm perpetuated against those of color.

The cancer of racism continues to plague the United States and other developed nations. W.E.B Du Bois famously avowed the challenge of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line. His admonishment stressed the belief that in the presence of racism, society's capacity to flourish is hampered. Frantz Fanon once said, ". . . it is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to . . ." (Fanon, 1963, p. xiii). Society continues to use the irrationality of race as a cleaver to sever one's ability to reach their fullest potential. The trammels to human flourishing is expressed in a few of the following statistics. Black Americans are statistically incarcerated in disproportionate numbers (Alexander, 2010). The average white American family has nearly 13 times the amount of wealth as compared to the average Black American family (Oluo, 2018). The college graduation rate for Black students is 40%, while their white colleagues graduate at 64% (NCES, 2019). Sadly, the list of other common metrics to measure human flourishing reveals very similar outcomes. If we believe that all people are created equal and should have commensurate opportunities to flourish, the aforementioned statistics should serve as alarm bells for higher education.

The Purpose of Education

Our society continues to wrestle with the remnants of racism. Unfortunately, higher education is not immune to the pernicious effects of racial attitudes. Although colleges and universities purport to be a brave environments for young people to exchange ideas, interact with diverse perspectives and engage in the fostering of human flourishing, racism and hegemony remains a trammel in that process. As a result, academia has a responsibility and opportunity to leverage various virtues in order to reestablish human flourishing as one of its core purposes.

At the core of education is the desire to promote the human flourishing of every individual. Although the literature does not offer a definitive definition of what constitutes human flourishing, many scholars avow that it is the capacity to fulfill one's potential (Arthur et al., 2017). Charged with the task of promoting human flourishing, specifically amongst young people, education by nature is a moral endeavor. Educators are not solely concerned with students achieving course learning objectives; they want them to become reflective, thoughtful, honest, and intellectually courageous. This is a moral and intellectual undertaking with the aim of eviscerating, among other things, the yokes of prejudice and racism.

The eminent sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois once alluded to the maxim that the purpose of education is not to transform men and women into professionals, but to convert professionals into men and women (Du Bois, 1903). His prescience points to his appreciation for the importance of nurturing the whole person. Professors often find themselves at the intersection of competing virtues. For example, honesty with regard to the quality of a student's work and compassion pertaining to

shielding a student's self-esteem. It is not simply a moral debate about choosing between a virtue and a vice. It is a deeper moral and intellectual calculus of finding the appropriate blend of virtues, with the aim of fostering human flourishing. Given the immense responsibility of educators, proper training grounded in virtues and cultural awareness is paramount.

Virtues

At a rudimentary level, a virtue is an action that promotes goodness (Arthur et al., 2017). For instance, the cardinal virtues of justice, prudence, wisdom and temperance are said to lead to human flourishing (n.d, 2020). Aristotle asserts living a virtuous life is constitutive of *eudaimonia* (Kristjansson, 2015). However, he also avows the integrative nature of virtues. In this case, as will become more evident in the PD session of the paper, integration speaks to balancing various virtues into a recipe that fosters goodness. The literature espouses the essential nature of having a blueprint. The virtuous blueprint provides faculty insight into the dimensions of a flourishing classroom environment (Darnell et al., 2019). It is analogous to an architectural blueprint in that it establishes the dimensions and vision of a flourishing learning environment. Aristotelians stress the significance of virtuous motivation, as it bridges the lacuna between knowing what is right and doing the right thing. Therefore, the virtue of justice relates to the creation and sustainment of an equitable society, while fortitude, also known as courage, pertains to the motivation to concretize thoughts and beliefs into action. Hence, justice in the absence of courage equates to wishful thinking.

Granted, many virtues can be leveraged in order to tackle racism; however, this article pays special attention to courage and justice, as both are central to our Lasallian mission. At the core of our Lasallian mission is social justice. Inherent in the focus on social justice is the call to advocate for those suffering from injustice. Courage is defined as the emotional strength that hinges on the exercise of will to accomplish objectives in the face of trammels (Kobam et al., 2011). Character strengths such as bravery, perseverance and honesty underpin the virtue of courage (Seligman & Peterson, 2004). Courage can also be envisaged as the balance between being timid and temerity (Bruin, 2013). Courage is one of the major building blocks of character because it serves as the mortar between knowing what is right and doing what is needed (Harrison et al., 2020). Courage, however, requires that faculty are veracious in their assessment of the organizational culture. It also demands that faculty find the golden mean between confidence in their capacities and humility in their assessment. For instance, when faculty encounter racialized attitudes on campus, it is not enough to privately scold said actions, but to address them in order to promote justice.

Justice is a civic strength that fortifies a healthy community (Kobam et al., 2011). Seligman and Peterson (2004) connotes that teamwork, fairness and leadership traits undergird justice. Others defined the virtue of justice as ensuring that everyone receives his/ her due (Arthur, 2020). Racism is the antithesis of justice as it usurps certain individuals of their inalienable rights. Academic freedom includes traits such as autonomy, freedom of expression and scholarly pursuits. These elements constitute the required learning environment to foster the dissemination of novel ideas (Sahin & Kesik, 2020). In essence, justice speaks to the idea of freedom, the removal of any shackles that prevent an individual from expressing their knowledge, skills and talents to a larger community. It is virtually impossible to flourish in the presence of an unjust environment. Analogously, it is quixotic thinking to hope a plant will flourish in the absence of water. Finally,

justice reminds faculty of the importance of equity. It prods us to ensure our curriculum is fair and balanced and provides a space for marginalized voices. For instance, are learners introduced to scholars and authors from historically under-represented communities?

A Proposed Professional Development Program

Teachers bear a responsibility that extends beyond the dissemination of knowledge (Fullard & Watts, 2019). Teachers possess the opportunity to influence students through their classroom interactions. In essence, faculty have the privilege of serving as moral and intellectual exemplars. Instructors are expected to maintain high moral standards in both their personal and professional endeavors (Fullard & Watts, 2019). This heightened moral responsibility requires effective PD as it would be unreasonable to assume teachers wield a high cultural and equity quotient in the absence of initial and sustained training.

In order to navigate the ambiguous cultural and equitable situations that arise on college and university campuses, faculty, staff and administration require training and development that pays special attention to both the moral and pedagogical dimensions of education (Fullard & Watts, 2019). According to Walter and Biggs (2012), effective faculty training entails seven elements. Their findings assert these elements: (a) concrete classroom based training, (b) including outside expertise, (c) allowing teachers to self-select, (d) enabling teachers to work collaboratively with peers, (e) provide opportunities for mentoring and coaching, (f) sustained overtime and (g) supported by institutional leadership. For the purpose of this article, the proposed PD session will leverage: (1) concrete classroom based training, (2) external expert consultants, (3) collaboration with peers, and (4) the support of leadership.

The PD session will consist of a six-hour training seminar during the yearly faculty convocation. The convocation is an opportune time as faculty, staff and leadership gather with the collective goal of promoting intellectual flourishing for the upcoming academic year. Moreover, leadership will have the opportunity to start the day with a keynote that stresses the importance of the PD training module. The seminar will be broken into three, two-hour training sessions. An outside expert in the field will lead each module. The first module will address unconscious bias. This module of the PD will consist of Emotional Intelligence (EI), language of inclusion, and intent vs. impact training. The second training module centers on culturally responsive teaching. This portion will include establishing a common language around diversity and inclusion for all university members. The final module will cover Character Education (CE), specifically the introduction of the cardinal virtues of courage and justice.

The first phase of training focuses on unconscious bias. During this two-hour module, faculty, staff and leadership will explore the elements of EI. According to Goleman (1995) EI consists of: (a) emotional awareness, (b) emotional management, (c) emotional motivation, (d) empathy, and (e) social intelligence. Specifically, emotional awareness and empathy will be the focal points as the goal is to help participants better appreciate how emotions and empathy promote flourishing communities. This is particularly true when working in diverse environments. Language of inclusion is an essential component of the first phase of training as it equips learners with the tools to mitigate stereotypical language. For instance, it covers how to ask clarifying questions and tools to interrupt and redirect so that conversations remain productive and socially and culturally

supportive. The module culminates in exploring the difference between intent and impact. This portion of the training is paramount as it ensures that all parties involved discuss issues from a shared pool of knowledge.

The second phase of training centers on culturally responsive teaching. According to Kruse et al., (2018) culturally responsive teaching must include the following: a) shared knowledge, and b) professional learning at all levels. The first component of shared knowledge helps faculty, staff and leadership create a common language associated with diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). It establishes ground rules and standards around how language will be used. In order to promote shared knowledge, participants will read sections from the book *Cast: The Origins of Our Discontent* by Isabel Wilkerson. In her work, the author provides the reader with a common language to grapple with societal racism. The book also proffers a nuanced understanding of the underpinnings of racism at the systemic level. In addition, learners will read Sara Ahmed's work: *On Being Included: Racism & Diversity in Institutional Life*. In her book, the author highlights many obstacles inherent in conducting (DEI) work on campuses. The reading is paramount as it avows that colleges and universities often fail to engage in meaningful DEI initiatives.

The final two-hour module will highlight character education. Appreciating the limited amount of time allotted for such a gravid concept, participants will explore the constructs of human flourishing and virtues. The first reading is the text "On the promotion of human flourishing" by Tyler J. Vanderweele. His work examines the five elements of human flourishing. The author also provides a topology between the five elements of human flourishing and their relationship with family, work, education, and religious communities. Once a rudimentary understanding of human flourishing is established, learners will engage with James C. Overholser's article "Elements of the Socratic Method Promoting Virtue in Everyday Life." The work explores, in detail, the contours of both courage and justice. It sheds insight into a panoptic understanding of the two virtues and strategies for implementation. In doing so, readers are prepared to understand the degree to which they currently engage with courage and justice.

Following the two readings, dilemma base scenarios will be utilized to examine the correlation between human flourishing and the virtues of courage and justice. The integrative portion illuminates the adjudication of the various virtues. Subsequently, small groups of 3-4 participants will discuss how the various virtues foster a flourishing community. The objective of this portion of the training is to facilitate understanding and appreciation for the blueprint of a flourishing environment and the dismantling of organizational racism. Finally, each participant will be asked to reflect on and create short journal entries detailing their daylong training. The purpose for journaling is to allow space for critical reflection.

The proposed PD sessions aim to equip faculty, staff and leadership with the tools to better recognize and address organizational racism. To that end, it is imperative that members of the university family are aware of their current biases as it pertains to the illusion of race. Given the visceral nature of race, it can be challenging to accept the prejudicial attitude and beliefs held about various groups of individuals. The unconscious bias portion of the PD session aims to reveal some of these latent beliefs and extend to participants the opportunity to assuage them.

As we become more aware of our racial blind spots, we are better equipped to embrace productive language around the construct of race. Culturally responsive teaching techniques proffer participants a robust understanding of systemic racism and transitions the conversation from individual behaviors to that of institutional malfeasance. It is difficult to address racism when it is viewed at the micro as compared to the macro level. Thus, regardless of one's intentions, if the outcomes of organizational decisions promote disparities between groups, the institution is engaged in racist behavior.

Our fundamental goal as institutions of higher learning is to promote human flourishing. As stated earlier in the paper, in order to accomplish said objective, the opportunity to reach one's potential should be extended to all members of society. The virtue of justice serves as our North Star. Once members of a community have a common language of the virtues and a panoptic understanding of its relationship with human flourishing, faculty, staff and leadership are positioned to ensure organizational decisions promote equitable outcomes. For instance, if all racialized groups are not graduating at the same rate, we have a common interest to reduce the lacuna. The virtue of courage serves as the moral motivation for faculty, staff and leadership to ensure justice is met. It is the bridge between intention and impact. If we have the intention of ensuring all members of the university graduate at similar rates, the virtue of courage prods us to challenge the status quo, even when it may lead to uncomfortable conversations.

Conclusion

A society that purports to promote human flourishing must dismantle racism. The two cannot coexist as racism prevents various members of the community from reaching their highest potential. Any university that is committed to justice and equity has the opportunity to address the negative effects of racism. However, it is virtually impossible to do so if we possess racialized attitudes. It is frustrating to tackle an issue if we fail to address it at its root. It becomes a cacophony of errors if we do not share common tools to solve the problem. To that end, the proposed three-part PD session aims to furnish university members with a few skills in order to tackle the miasma of racism.

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Endnote

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