

## **Showing What We Tell: Facilitating Antiracist Education in Cross-Racial Teams**

**Robin DiAngelo**  
Westfield State College<sup>1</sup>

**Darlene Flynn**  
Seattle Office for Civil Rights<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

Antiracist education seeks to interrupt relations of racial inequality by educating people to identify, name, and challenge the norms, patterns, traditions, structures, and institutions that keep racism and white supremacy in place. One norm and tradition of racism that antiracist practice seeks to interrupt is unilateral white leadership. This paper is based on an interactive workshop in which participants explore a training approach that both models and deepens antiracism work: facilitating in cross-racial teams. We offer a rationale for cross-racial facilitation and explore common challenges and how to work with them. These challenges include racial pitfalls for white facilitators and facilitators of color. Using an example from our work leading antiracist workshops, we illustrate many of the dynamics that a cross-racial team must navigate. We discuss the pre- and postwork that is necessary for successful cross-racial leading and offer tools and techniques for working together as a team and with a workshop group.

### **An Illustrative Story**

We are a cross-racial facilitation team<sup>3</sup> and have led antiracist education together for many years. We are leading a work group in an antiracist training. The group of 40 participants is racially diverse (approximately half people of color and half white) and tightly packed into a small training room. It is just before lunch and we are one-third of the way through an all-day session. The white trainer has finished an in-depth presentation on white privilege that appears to have gone well; the group listened attentively and no challenges were raised. She has traded places with her cotrainer, a black woman who is now standing in front of the group with the white trainer sitting next to her. The trainer of color is leading the group in the corollary section to the previous

one: the impact of racism on people of color. She has prefaced her talk with the statement, “I will now be specifically engaging the people of color in the room on the topic of how systematic white racism impacts us. This is a very sensitive conversation for us to have in the presence of white people, and I ask the white participants to simply listen.” Yet as she begins moving down a list of ways that people of color are impacted by racism, a white woman repeatedly questions her. The trainer does her best to speak to the woman’s questions, but the interruption continues. Finally, in response to an example given by the trainer of color of how internalized oppression manifests for people of color, the white woman states to the trainer of color, “I think its more complex than that.” At this point, the white trainer leans in and quietly asks her cotrainer if she would like her to intervene. The trainer of color says yes and the white trainer steps in and points out to the white participant what is racially problematic about the way she is engaging. The white woman is shocked and expresses outrage at the “accusation” that her actions could have a racist impact. The room immediately divides along the lines of whether the woman has been “mistreated” or not, with many people speaking at once. Other participants nervously withdraw. A black man calls out that the white trainer has treated the white woman unfairly. A black woman calls out in response that the black man is acting on his internalized racial oppression by “rescuing” the white woman. The room erupts in emotional reaction to their charges.

### **Theoretical Framework: Antiracist Education**

There are many models used in social justice education, including diversity training, antiracist education, multicultural education, and cultural competency training. While all of these models appear to be similar in that they address cultural difference, they may or

may not rest on shared tenets. For example, cultural competency training seldom names racism, theorizes power, or critiques systems of institutional oppression (Pon, 2009). Antiracist education, however, by design names racism and seeks to recognize and challenge differentials in access to social and institutional power among whites and people of color<sup>4</sup> (Derman-Sparks, & Ramsey, 2006; Mullaly, 2002). Deliberately avoiding the “celebrating differences” approach common to much of diversity and cultural competency training, antiracist education centers the analysis on the social, cultural, and institutional power that so profoundly shapes the meaning and outcome of racial difference (Nieto, 2007). The leadership model explored in this paper is based on the framework of antiracist education, which conceptualizes racism as a multilayered, multidimensional, ongoing, adaptive process that functions to maintain, reinforce, reproduce, normalize, and render invisible white power and privilege.

Racism encompasses economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources, and power between white people and people of color (Akintunde, 1999; Fine, 1997; Goldberg, 1993; Hilliard, 1992). This unequal distribution benefits whites and disadvantages people of color overall (although individual whites may be “against” racism, they still benefit from a system that privileges their group). Racism is not fluid within the United States in that it does not flow back and forth, one day benefiting whites and another day (or even era) benefiting people of color. The direction of power between whites and people of color is historic, traditional, normalized, and deeply embedded in the fabric of U.S. society (Feagin, 2001; Mills, 1999). No one who is born into and raised in Western culture (and increasing, globally) can escape being socialized to participate in

these inequitable racial relations (Van Ausdale, 2002). In this paper we use the term “white supremacy” to capture this all-encompassing power structure in which we are all complicit<sup>5</sup> (although impacted in profoundly different ways depending on our position in the hierarchy).

Antiracist education seeks to interrupt relations of racial inequality by educating people to identify, name, and challenge the norms, patterns, traditions, structures, and institutions that keep racism and white supremacy in place. One norm and tradition of racism that antiracist practice seeks to interrupt is white leadership. This paper will provide a rationale for leading in cross-racial teams as a means to challenge racism, address common pitfalls when leading cross-racially, and offer tools and techniques to address these challenges.

### **Why Lead in Cross-Racial Teams?**

Put simply, a cross-racial team interrupts racism by providing a new model of leadership. In a white supremacist society, few of us have been given images of role models for the leadership of people of color. For example, if our first image of ultimate power and authority beyond our parents were images of God or Jesus, we most likely saw white men. If religion did not play a large role in our lives, or if we were raised in religions who did not value iconography (such as Jews or Jehovah’s Witnesses) other key role models were our teachers (the teaching force is over 90 percent white and this percentage is actually increasing) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). When we watched the news; visited statues in parks and museums; were shown our heroes and heroines in books, movies, and television, all of us, regardless of our own race, were presented with images for leadership in the overarching culture that were white. In this

context, to lead in a cross-racial team (in which the white member does not dominate and the leader of color does not assist) is to interrupt racial norms and expectations and provide the powerful real-life images and modeling of cross-racial leadership that we have been denied. This interruption of typical norms for leadership is key for the participants being led, but also for the leadership team itself. In that regard, it is a powerful “laboratory” for cultivating cross-racial skills and the opportunity to practice interrupting socialized patterns of racism.

A cross-racial team will invariably be stretched as traditional racial patterns of leadership are broken. Authentic cross-racial leadership requires sustaining honest and courageous dialogue across race about how racism manifests, solving problems, coordinating efforts, responding to racial mistakes, and resolving conflicts. These requirements necessarily bring us to the limits of our skills in that they compel commitment from each team member to deal with racial tensions—a commitment that the culture at large does not require and that few of us are practiced in. Through the process, however, we can build the authentic relationships that are critical for effective team leadership. Of course, bringing us to the limits of our skills is precisely what gives cross-racial teams such potential for growth, but at the same time, our skill limits can also operate to lull us back into familiar and comfortable (albeit racist) patterns of engagement. The next section addresses some of the challenges and dynamics of racism that often manifest when leading in cross-racial teams.

### **Challenges of Cross-Racial Teams**

In the context of the white supremacy in which we are embedded, changes in our racial socialization don’t come easily and our roles in the racist structure, regardless of where

we are positioned in the racial hierarchy, take a lifetime of committed practice to unravel. For people of color, this means actively challenging the internalization of messages of inferiority (referred to as internalized racial oppression or IRO). For whites this means actively challenging the internalization of messages of superiority (referred to as internalized racial dominance or IRD). Both IRO and IRD result in patterns of behavior that may seem natural. Given how racist norms and patterns are obscured (particularly for whites) and the ways in which racism mutates and adapts while it continues to accomplish its work (i.e., dominant discourse about a “postracial” society at the same time that segregation is increasing), we can never relax about challenging racism in general and our own IRO or IRD in particular.

It is a basic premise of antiracist education that racism is operating at all times and in myriad ways; racism is not isolated in discrete incidents that some individuals may or may not “do,” but is embedded in all aspects of society, including our very identities (DiAngelo, 2006). Patterns of racism *will* manifest and can reinforce racism for the team and the participants if the team is not vigilant. We discuss common dynamics and challenges of interracial teams in general racial terms. Intersecting identities will impact and complicate these dynamics, such as gender, ability, sexuality, age, and so on. For example, navigating gender differences in the team will add another layer to the challenges of leading and to the ways in which participants respond to the team. It is beyond the scope of this article to address these intersections, but they should be explored between team members.

### **Common Dynamics: White Partner**

Because all white people who are raised in white supremacist culture have internalized, to varying degrees, white superiority, which is often coupled with a lack of practice in *authentic*<sup>6</sup> cross-racial relationship building, there are many problematic patterns that the white partner may manifest. A strong white member of a cross-racial team must stay alert and resist complacency, as these patterns reinforce racism and white dominance for the members of the team as well as the participants. These patterns include:

- The white partner assumes the lead, takes over the lead, interjects comments, summarizes the partner's points or otherwise has the last word, dominates the session, and/or recenters him- or herself.
- The white partner abandons the partner of color when the training gets challenging (e.g., by sitting at the back of the room and leaving the partner to lead alone, or by distancing him- or herself from the partner of color if she/he says something "provocative" and/or is being challenged by the group). Distancing can occur through silence, engaging in negotiation with the group about the point the partner made, modifying or softening a point made by the partner in order to appease the group, or explicit disagreement or questioning of the partner in front of the group.
- The white partner defaults to socialization to avoid racial conflict and evades addressing issues on the team. When working with a group, the white partner avoids or smooths over conflict, maintains comfort, or plays it safe, which dilutes the objectives of the work and thus coddles the racist status quo. If the trainer of color is taking risks, smoothing over conflict undermines that trainer by setting the white trainer up as the "good" trainer.
- The white partner doesn't use his or her position and power to challenge racism or leaves the trainer of color to do it. The white partner doesn't use his or her position to back up points made by the trainer of color.
- The white partner trusts his or her own ability to think about racism in isolation from people of color, and makes decisions without consulting the partner of color. He or she may also override decisions made by or in consultation with the partner of color. The white partner does not make his or her decision-making process transparent to the partner of color.
- When working with difficult and resistant groups, the white partner uses the partner of color to process how "hard" the group is, which functions to minimize

and invalidate the profound differences in how the room impacts each trainer based on his or her race, and the ultimate direction that racism flows (no matter how difficult the group is, in the end, their resistance will benefit white supremacy, and thus the white trainer).

- The white partner assumes that his or her partner is having the same experience and is impacted in the same way that he or she is (“What a great group!”). However, a group that feels open and welcoming to a white trainer can feel very hostile to a trainer of color, for precisely the same reasons it feels welcoming to the white trainer (white liberalism is a pernicious form of racism, and a group perceived as “open” to the white trainer may seem very inauthentic and dangerously oblivious to a trainer of color).
- The white partner doesn’t give the partner of color constructive feedback—white guilt causes him or her to feel too uncomfortable guiding or “correcting” a person of color, so the partner doesn’t get the feedback that is essential to professional growth.
- The white partner doesn’t check in to see how it is going for the trainer of color and doesn’t cultivate cross-racial curiosity.

### **Common Dynamics: Partner of Color**

People of color in leadership inevitably bring a lifetime of experiences with institutional racism that can result in a complex mix of survival and striving patterns (Bivens, 1995; Mullaly, 2002; Sue, 2003). These patterns result in an internal tension that can be difficult to unravel. While one’s parents or other supportive role models may have conveyed one’s value, the larger society in which we are all embedded does not. On the one hand, there is the message that one is smart, capable of anything, and has the right to expect to be treated well. On the other, there are the ubiquitous messages that surround us when we open our textbooks in school, receive discipline from whites in authority, have our intelligence assessed by white teachers, watch TV and movies, play with other children, etc. As a result, people of color often find themselves leading without reliable touchstones regarding their ability and right to lead and because society denies that this is

a result of systematic racism, attributing that lack to some deficiency in themselves.

Working in an antiracist cross-race training team provides an opportunity to explore and strategize to interrupt the internalized patterns that limit us through the process of building a relationship with a committed white cotrainer.

The mere appearance of a person of color in a role not socially assigned—in this case, as an authority figure on equal footing with a white authority figure—challenges the accepted “order.” Through this challenge, there is a rich opportunity for leaders of color to identify and work through the various layers of internalized oppression that could be limiting them. A team member of color can intentionally maximize this opportunity by staying alert to the patterns he or she carries that work to collude with racism. These patterns include:

- The partner of color doubts his or her ability to lead, which may manifest in feeling more comfortable in the background, avoiding challenging content, waiting to be asked to step up even when he or she is the most qualified, or trying not to take up “too much” or equal space.
- The partner of color feels like an imposter. He or she has a distracting fear that people will find out that he or she has knowledge gaps. The partner of color sells him- or herself short (undercharging or working for less pay than others with the same or less experience), or prefaces his or her leadership with apologies as though he or she were not entitled to lead.
- The partner of color doesn’t trust his or her own perspective. He or she routinely needs outside validation, is hesitant to share his or her thinking, or waits to find out what the coleader (whom he or she sees as the expert) thinks or wants.
- Caretaking. The partner of color takes on or accepts disproportionate responsibility/work (emotional and/or physical) to make the team “work,” and lets problematic dynamics go to avoid making the white partner “feel bad.”
- Conflict avoidance. The partner of color feels “lucky” to have the work so avoids “rocking the boat” by confronting the white partner on racist patterns. He or she doesn’t give honest feedback to the cotrainer to avoid creating tension.

It is important to note that many of the patterns on these two lists collude perfectly with each other. For example, while the white partner has been socialized to see him- or herself as the lead and will lean towards assuming the lead, the partner of color has been socialized to doubt his or her ability to lead and may easily (and even with relief) hand off leadership to the white partner. In this way, both internalized racial dominance and internalized racial oppression are reinforced, while seeming to occur “naturally”—simply as a function of each trainer’s unique “preference.” The white partner may even see him- or herself as being supportive to the partner of color by taking on aspects of leadership his or her partner finds difficult. Sometimes the white partner taking on key aspects of leadership is strategically wise, for example, when deciding who should challenge white participants or make the most direct statements about white power and privilege. But these decisions should always be explored within the context of internalized racial oppression and internalized racial dominance. A team that is not on top of its own internalized patterns will necessarily model traditional (and often subtle) racist dynamics and inadvertently *reinforce* racism for the group, rather than challenge it.

### **Group Dynamics**

A primary objective of antiracist education is to interrupt the traditional norms, policies, practices, and procedures that reinforce and reproduce white racism. These norms include not talking openly about race and not having role models for cross-racial leadership. The mere presence of a cross-racial team, coupled with the explicitness of the discussion on race, will challenge and unsettle everyone’s racial socialization. As the session unfolds, the concepts and exercises presented become even more challenging. In addition, the racial identities of the trainers will trigger participants and impact how each trainer is

perceived, heard, and responded to. Unfortunately, we are seldom aware of the socialized racial filters through which we view people; most people see themselves as objective and will insist that race has nothing to do with their assessments of the trainers. Adding to this complexity, participants often make unconscious moves intended to ward off feelings of racial disquiet and regain racial comfort (DiAngelo, 2009). As illustrated in the opening story, the unconscious nature of racism makes these reactions highly charged, and addressing them head-on usually invokes defensiveness.

For whites, when an educational program directly addresses racism and the privileging of whites, common responses include anger, withdrawal, emotional incapacitation, guilt, argumentation, and cognitive dissonance (all of which reinforce the pressure on facilitators to avoid directly addressing racism). So-called progressive whites may not respond with anger but still insulate themselves via claims that they are beyond the need for engaging with the content because they “already had a class on this” or “already know this.” All of these reactions function to maintain the racial status quo. In the dominant position, whites are almost always racially comfortable and thus have developed unchallenged expectations to remain so. Not having had to build tolerance for racial discomfort, when racial discomfort arises whites typically respond as if something is “wrong,” and blame the person or event that triggered the discomfort. Another key challenge of antiracist education is that most whites conceptualize racism as occurring only in individual acts that only bad people do. This way of thinking about racism makes it very hard to talk honestly with a group about how racism is manifesting because for many whites identifying racist patterns in their behavior is akin to saying that they are bad people. When white people get upset about a challenge to racist norms, people of

color can be triggered into survival patterns and, based on their history of harm from white people, work to diffuse the conflict to pacify whites, and thus inadvertently undermine the goals. All of the patterns of internalized racial dominance and internalized racial oppression that play out for the trainers can play out for the group.

Our opening story illustrates many of the dynamics discussed for trainers, playing out for the participants. Internalized racial dominance can be seen in the white woman's disregard of the trainer of color's request to just listen, her continual interruption and interrogation of the trainer of color but not the white trainer, her dismissal of the trainer of color's expertise as simplistic, and her defensiveness, sense of being accused, and rejection of the feedback when her impact was pointed out to her. These dynamics then triggered survival patterns of internalized racial oppression for the people of color. By claiming that the white woman had been mistreated, the black man moved into caretaking of her, seeking to smooth over her anger. This caretaking functioned to diffuse the impact of the white trainer's comments, and in so doing, left the trainer of color unsupported. In turn, a black woman challenged him (the black woman's public charge that the black man was acting on his internalized racial oppression). At this point, other people of color in the room started working hard to explain or play down the conflict, or nervously withdrew. This allowed white participants to focus on tensions between people of color and avoid looking at themselves. Yet as intense and racially familiar as all of these reactions were, virtually none of the participants consciously intended to undermine anyone.

The team needs to anticipate that the same dynamics that they struggle with can be triggered at any time in the room. The team's ability to get a handle on these triggers

among themselves will enable them to effectively deal with them when manifesting among the participants. A strong cross-racial team recognizes that from the moment participants enter the room (and often before as they anticipate the session), they will be racially unsettled. As the content unfolds, this racial disquiet increases and complicates the traditionally problematic patterns of engagement already present in mixed race groups. A united cross-race team becomes a kind of container or holding environment for the group, and thus needs to be clearly united.

### **Being Strategic: Pre-session Planning**

In this section we offer a guide to strategic cross-racial leading of workshops on antiracism. While there is extensive literature on the dynamics of cross-racial dialogue (DiAngelo, 2006; DiAngelo & Allen, 2006; Hyers & Swimm, 1998; Miller & Donner, 2000; Powell, 1997; Roman, 1993; Shelton & Richeson, 2005), there is very little on the *specific* dynamics of leading these dialogues cross-racially (see Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Arnold, Burke, James, D'Arcy, & Thomas 1991; Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003). Thus, this guide is based on our experience leading cross-racially over the past seven years. It is important to note that while this may read as a “how-to” guide and many may find it useful precisely for this reason, teams need to be flexible and “organic,” adapting any framework used to the unique dynamics of each individual team.

Given the unique and complex dimensions of antiracist training in a cross-racial team, the following are essential issues to explore in planning a session:

- Talk through previous challenges: What worked? What didn't? What, if anything, would you change for the next time?
- Decide the speaking order from the framework of challenging white dominance and intentionally use each trainer's position in the racial hierarchy. Also take into consideration the racial demographics of your group. For example, generally the

person who starts the training is seen as the leader, so having the trainer of color introduce the session can interrupt the expectation for white leadership. However, having the white trainer cover ground rules during the introduction with a predominately white group may be wise because this is a potential place for white resistance and the white partner covering ground rules can minimize having that resistance directed towards the trainer of color from the start. With a group that is predominately people of color, having the trainer of color cover the ground rules can minimize reinforcing the effect of a white person giving rules.

- Decide the agenda order, being attentive to the dynamics of pacing and who will end up doing which parts if presenters are alternating covering agenda items. Take into consideration the balance of airtime and who is leading which topics and why.
- Discuss what support might be needed from one another to be the most effective leaders during the session.
- Discuss how each presenter will check in with the other. What signal will be used to attract the copresenter's attention when the presenter needs assistance or needs to call a break?

### **Being Strategic: During the Session**

If unexpected challenges arise during the session that require flexibility and attention, use your prearranged check-in technique to quickly maneuver. If the issue doesn't require immediate attention, a check-in can occur during a break. You will need to decide:

- Who will do the intervention? Issues to consider are: the racial dynamics involved in the issue and which trainer's racial position will be most effective in the intervention; the skills of each partner; and how the issue is affecting each partner.
- When and how will you do the intervention?
- What might you need from each other?

Techniques:

- Take a break to check in. A break can be called spontaneously or participants can be put in pairs or small groups to discuss a topic while you consult together.

- Make decisions transparently. For example, tell the group what the challenge is and what you are going to do and why.
- Call a caucus. Within the context of antiracist education, caucuses are same-race groups who meet together to discuss aspects of racism that are specific to their group. Caucuses provide the opportunity for each group to discuss their issues or feelings and their next steps without the pressure of the presence of the other racial group. A strong leader who shares the race of the caucus should facilitate each caucus. For example, when we lead together, Darlene leads the caucus for people of color and Robin lead the caucus for whites. When we are working with a larger and more diverse team, we can break off into more specific caucuses, such as whites, Asian heritage, Latina/o, bi-/multiracial, etc. Caucuses are an especially powerful intervention when tension and conflict across racial divides are high.
- Do a hand off, passing the lead to the other trainer if his or her racial identity makes him/her more effective with the issue or if the trainer leading feels overwhelmed, out of ideas, etc. For example, if a trainer of color is leading a section and is getting continually challenged by a white participant, she may pass the lead off to the white trainer who can use her shared white identity to push back on the participant with more authority and less personal and political risk.
- As much as possible, stay physically close together. It's usually fine to have the trainer who is leading a particular section standing while the cotrainer sits to the side, but it is not recommended for one of the trainers to sit in the back of the room while the other presents. Doing so reinforces several problematic dynamics. If the trainer sitting in the back is white, she leaves the trainer of color alone in front and unsupported. Given the dynamics of white racism, an isolated trainer of color is an easy target for white resistance. When the white trainer is clearly visible and at the side of the trainer of color, he or she conveys that he or she is in support of what his or her cotrainer is saying (of course it is critical that he/she does not cut in and "take over" from the sidelines). Conversely, when a trainer of color sits in the back, the image of a white person leading alone and in front is reinforced for participants, and traditional representations of white leadership are reinforced.

### **Being Strategic: Staying Healthy as a Member of a Cross-Racial Leadership Team**

A basic premise of antiracist education is that it is lifelong work; the process of identifying and challenging patterns of racism is always evolving and never finished. It is essential that each trainer continue to do his or her own racial work outside of the leadership relationship. While many white cotrainers may believe that if their partners of

color are not raising issues of racism that are manifesting on their team, then there aren't any, from an antiracist framework, a lack of issues should be viewed as a red flag. In the context of white supremacy, it is not possible for racism not to be manifesting on a cross-racial team, and if issues are not coming up for discussion, it is likely due to a range of related dynamics, including a sense that the white partner will not be receptive to them (a common white pattern). The following suggestions can help each member identify areas in need of skill-building and continued growth:

- Have a circle of same-identity support. For example, leaders of color should be involved in an on-going people-of-color caucus, and white leaders in a white caucus.
- Resist complacency—check in with each other consistently and frequently ask for feedback.
- Stay involved in continuing education through reading, workshops, conferences, support groups, and other forums.
- Make a commitment to stay in the work and stick by your partner.
- Commit to each other's growth.
- Give honest, specific, and detailed feedback, balancing positive feedback with feedback that is more difficult to hear.
- Remember your shared purpose/vision when things get hard. Remind your partner of this vision when he or she feels hopeless (a note of caution: If you are white, be sensitive to your privileged position when encouraging your partner of color. Ask him or her early on how you can support him or her when he or she feels discouraged, rather than assume that what you find encouraging will have the same impact on your partner of color).
- Take risks in the service of your *own* growth—putting your own liberation and the liberation of your racial group first. When whites take on antiracist work in order to “help” people of color, they reinforce paternalistic, missionary, and colonialist relations between whites and people of color. For people of color, doing this work increases their effectiveness in the larger society and with other people of color, and ultimately reduces the effort required to challenge the racist system.

- Be aware of your other identities and how they intersect with your race and can work to undermine your antiracist practice. For example, for white, middle-class women, the class and gender socialization to “look good,” save face, and avoid conflict can interfere with the ability to take risks and confront racism in oneself and other whites. For people of color, class and gender differences can set up divides and patterns that undermine the goals of working together to challenge institutional racism.

We recommend that teams create worksheets to guide them through these discussions.

The worksheet we use is divided into pre- and postsession sections. Each section has a series of questions that are designed to address many of the points discussed in this paper.

Some questions address specific issues, such as how we will communicate to one another, who will do what sections and why, etc. Other questions speak to more personal issues of support and self-awareness, such as how each trainer’s other social identities (class, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, religion, etc.) intersect with race and what their partners should understand about these intersections, emotional trigger points for each trainer, etc. When planning for a session, the questions help guide the way we develop the curriculum for each group. After training, the questions guide our debriefing session and ensure that we discuss some of the more sensitive (and thereby more tempting to avoid) dimensions of our work together. Questions here will include how well supported each trainer felt by his or her partner, what aspects of racism each trainer recognized manifesting on the team, what new insights he or she gained about how race works, and what skills he or she wants to continue to develop.

### **Concluding the Story**

For many facilitators, the opening vignette is one of the worst imaginable scenarios when leading antiracist education cross-racially. And while it was indeed among the more challenging situations we have ever dealt with, there was not a moment in which either of

us felt we had lost control of the group. In fact, it was a very powerful session for almost everyone involved, including us. No amount of explanation, presentation of theory, or group exercises could match the degree of learning and self-awareness that participants gained that day. Through their own and their peers' spontaneous reactions to the highly charged racial dynamics, they gained a rare glimpse into many aspects of their racial socialization. So what did we do to turn the tide from looming disaster to constructive learning? As we return to the story, we will use our real names.

Darlene (the trainer of color) quickly checked in with Robin (the white trainer) and then called for racial caucus groups, with people of color staying in the same room with Darlene and whites moving with Robin to an adjacent room. Each caucus gave members a place to explore what had happened and their reactions to it, specifically from the perspective of their racial identity and without the pressure of the presence of the other racial group. As emotions were expressed and abated, more reflection occurred and the participants moved towards deeper understanding; they were able to apply their reactions to the framework we had presented. Many of the dynamics we had been discussing were illustrated in action. Each facilitator was able to map out for the participants (and with the participants' help) the complex web of racial dynamics that were at play, from their particular racial group's perspectives. After about 45 minutes in caucus, the groups reunited and reported out the highlights of their caucuses. We co-led the discussion and shared with the participants our analysis of the situation and our decision-making process. The facilitated debriefing of the incident both in and following the caucus increased their insights, as participants were guided through a sustained analysis of their reactions from an antiracist framework.

One of the questions that came out of this larger group discussion was whether Robin had acted to “rescue” Darlene by stepping in and naming the woman’s behavior. This question allowed us to be transparent about some of the key dimensions of the intervention that assured us that this was a case of strategic support and alliance, and not rescue. First, Darlene was initially willing to entertain the woman’s questions, and Robin did not step in. However, given that Darlene had asked white participants to listen, the questions were problematic, and Robin watched closely for signs that Darlene might need support. While Darlene wasn’t making headway with the woman, it was her curriculum piece and she wasn’t signaling a need for backup. But at the point that the woman’s dismissal of Darlene became overt, Robin felt it was time to use her white position and privilege and speak to “one of her own” about how racism was playing out. However, she would not have stepped in and risked undermining Darlene’s leadership without checking first (had Darlene said no when asked if she needed her to step in, Robin would have deferred, and then consulted with Darlene over break about how best to return to the exchange as a teachable moment from her white perspective). Once one person of color challenged another, Darlene was the appropriate person to step back in and call for a caucus.

The following table illustrates the actions taken and how they functioned for the team.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Pattern(s) Challenged</b>	<b>Advance Team Prep</b>	<b>Learning</b>
Darlene handled initial interruptions from white participant	Doubting her own ability, expertise, or right to lead	Both agree that Darlene is a highly competent leader and when she is leading, she is in front – it’s her call.	Handling interaction in which her power is challenged affirmed her ability and increased her confidence.
Robin holds back, waits, watches and asks before making a move	Assuming she is the only one who can manage the situation. Making	Both aware of how white dominance plays out. Robin has educated	Robin’s commitment to adhering to guidelines of allyship affirmed in

	decisions unilaterally. Taking over.	herself on how privilege functions in herself and among her racial group.	practice and reinforced through Darlene’s sense of support. Always remember to ask before stepping in.
Robin steps in. Uses her white privilege in the service of interrupting racism.	Avoiding conflict, maintaining white solidarity by staying silent, playing it safe, not challenging other whites. Leaving people of color on their own to deal with racism.	Team clarity on racial roles and how to use racial position most strategically. Team has discussed signals.	Participant reactions can’t be controlled. No single perfect way to handle a situation but team needs to be in their integrity, and able to articulate clearly what decisions they make and why.
Darlene steps in and resumes leadership. Calls for caucuses.	Not trusting her own thinking. Withdrawing or turning decisions over to “expert.” Avoiding the difficult work of caucusing. Not holding firm with other people of color on internalized oppression.	Both are familiar with a range of facilitation strategies. Understand how caucuses work and are both competent to lead them. Trust each other’s thinking and capabilities.	Darlene is a capable expert. Can think flexibly under pressure. Leaning into conflict pays off.
Cooled after caucus. Stayed physically close and unified in decisions/content. Transparent with the group on our decision-making process and rationale.	Allowing group to divide team. Lose team cohesiveness. Physically separate. Try to move on and avoid staying with hard issues.	Deep trust built. Advanced strategizing on key issues, including room setup, our physical positions, who would lead which sections, etc. Both have done our “homework” and are strong in antiracist theory.	Transparency is important for a group’s learning. Team alignment is first priority—an aligned team can hold a group together.
Debriefed afterward. Shared each step of the training from our racial position and perspective. Gave and received feedback. Wove insights together. Discussed lessons learned.	Avoid giving or receiving difficult feedback. Assume that if one doesn’t talk about issues, then there are none. Give in to guilt and anxiety about perceived mistakes.	Routinely use our worksheet to guide the conversation and ensure it happens. We schedule in time to talk about training while it is still fresh. We revisit as often as needed.	The patterns for whites and people of color are not the same, but they hook together powerfully. Whites acting out racism trigger survival patterns in people of color. A strong cross-racial team is critical!

As should be clear, the racial dynamics were complex and shifted quickly. We believe that the deep relationship we have built by intentionally working together as a cross-racial team enabled us to think clearly and work collaboratively under great pressure. Each trainer knew the other well, had a good grasp of the dynamics of racism, and trusted each other to “have her back.” Although we have certainly struggled through situations in which Darlene has not felt supported by Robin as a woman of color, our commitment to

continuing the work has enabled us to move through these challenges. We have found no deeper or more authentic way to practice the lifelong work of ending racism than leading antiracist work cross-racially.

### **Notes**

1. Robin DiAngelo, Ph.D. Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, Westfield State College, 575 Western Ave., Parenzo 206, Westfield, MA 01186.

Email: rdiangelo@wsc.ma.edu

Tel: (413) 572-5325

Fax: (413) 572-5221

2. Darlene Flynn, Program Analyst, Seattle Office of Civil Rights, 810 3rd Avenue, Suite 750, Seattle, WA 98104.

Email: Darlene.flynn@seattle.gov

Tel: (206) 684-0291

3. Contact author.

2. Darlene Flynn is a woman of color (African heritage and white) and Robin DiAngelo is a white woman.

4. Race is a deeply complex sociopolitical system whose boundaries shift and adapt over time. As such, we recognize that “white” and “people of color” are not discreet categories, and that within these groupings are other levels of complexity and difference based on the various roles assigned by dominant society at various times (e.g., “Asian” vs. black, vs. Latino). However, for the purposes of this limited analysis, we use these terms to indicate the two general, socially recognized divisions of the racial hierarchy.

5. We do not use the phrase in lay terms to indicate the KKK or other groups who explicitly advocate for white power.

6. While many white people know some people of color, we use “authentic” to indicate cross-racial relationships that have at their core an understanding of white power and privilege, that recognize the inevitability of the dynamics of white power and privilege surfacing, and that explicitly and intentionally work towards interrupting white power and privilege in their relationship.

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