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How to be an Anti-Racist Educator: A Book Review Through an Educational Perspective

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Cover Page Footnote

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How to be an Anti-Racist Educator: A Book Review Through an Educational Perspective

Ibram X. Kendi: One World, 320 pp., \$14.12, ISBN 978-052-550-930-1 (Paperback) | ISBN 978-052-550-929-5 (eBook). Publication Date: 2019

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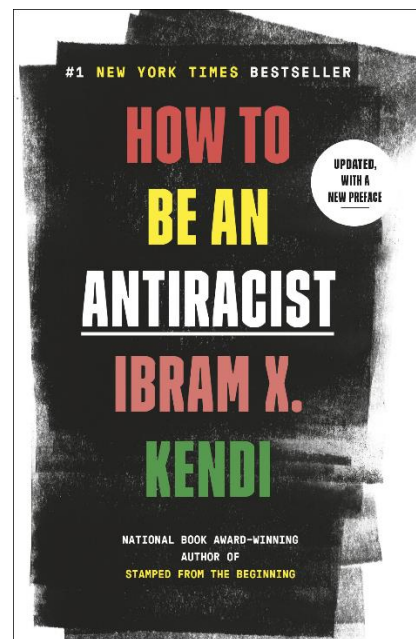
As bilingual educators in Texas, the authors of this book review have been immersed in bilingual school settings working with the Latino population. Thus, the authors advocate for a socially and racially equitable society where students are treated equally without educators' biases. The authors acknowledge that America is rooted in racial clashes; yet school curricula present scant opportunities for students to reflect on race and racial discrimination. Additionally, teachers have scarce access to opportunities to reflect on deep-rooted aspects of systemic racism and their reproduction on a smaller scale in school settings. Therefore, the authors believe an educational model based on antiracist principles would be essential to facilitate student learning of aspects inherent to racial discrimination and ways to fight racism. The urge for an antiracist educational approach is not new; however, it has become indispensable in our society lately. For example, studies have investigated how systemic racism operates in school settings by overrepresenting Black students among disciplinary referrals. Research has revealed that Black boys are perceived as more malicious, culpable, and more mature than White boys (Gregory & Roberts, 2017). Nevertheless, teacher professional development rarely or never includes

opportunities for teachers to reflect on racial discrimination in our society and our schools.

Thus, the book, *How to be an Antiracist*, by Ibram X. Kendi (2019; see Figure 1) would be an excellent asset for both experienced and novice teachers. In his book, the author guides readers by pulling apart the often-indistinguishable aspects of systemic racism deep-seated in our societal models. In an accessible way, Kendi brilliantly shapes antiracist stances as he defines racist actions and thoughts contributing to discrimination and inequity.

Figure 1

Cover of How to be an Antiracist



Note. From *How to be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi, 2019, One World. Copyright 2023 by Random House Group. Reprinted with permission.

The book's intro depicts Kendi's parents' journeys to fight for racial equity as Black university students in the '70s, which gradually evolves into the author's evolutionary process of racial consciousness and advocacy for racial equity.

Subsequently, Kendi outlines and defines racist and antiracist stances. The author explores concealed relations of power associated with White privilege and often unseen societal forms of discrimination. At the same time, he defines biological, ethical, behavioral, gender-oriented, and cultural racism, explaining these mechanisms' changeable and not necessarily fixed nature. As Kendi proposed, "what we say about race, what we do about race, in each moment determines what_not who_ we are" (p. 10).

The book *How to be an Antiracist* can be a powerful tool for teachers and educators interested in facilitating students' evolution towards antiracism and activism. Well-versed antiracist teachers are more equipped to show students the importance of constantly reviewing and revising their attitudes about race, historical aspects of racism, and how systemic racism persists in society. Moreover, teachers' critical consciousness about race and antiracist ideas may transform classroom and school cultures. Teachers may motivate students to embrace antiracist perspectives themselves by modeling antiracist attitudes. Antiracist teachers are fundamental in facilitating students' understanding that one should adopt equitable-based antiracist attitudes. This is achieved by evaluating racist and antiracist attitudes and naming and defining discriminatory situations.

For instance, Kendi's book can aid teachers in inspiring students to dismantle nonproductive misconceptions in the racial equity cause, such as *reverse discrimination*. According to Kendi (2019), reverse discrimination is a construction that White people often use when admonished by their racist attitudes. This stance implies a neutral notion about race that is embedded with victimism or the idea that White people are the victims of discrimination instead of non-White people. Kendi (2019) proposes that

this "White nationalist victimhood" perspective condemns any policy that aims to bring equity to non-White Americans. The author adds, "the most threatening racist movement is not the alt right's unlikely drive for a White ethnostate but the regular American's drive for a 'race neutral' one" (p. 20).

Additionally, antiracist teachers can identify other self-defensive mechanisms, such as being in *denial* about racist attitudes, which is also counterproductive. Racism denial is a common reaction from people who are pointed out as racist or for their racist attitudes. As Kendi (2019) proposes, "how often do we become reflexively defensive when someone calls something we've done or said racist?" (p. 9). Furthermore, the author talks through *neutrality* in the form of *non-racist* stances and *color blindness* propositions, cleverly dissecting the motives and examining the counterproductive consequences of discourses founded on racial denial.

Zooming from a broad social perspective into the school environment, we can see that besides facilitating antiracist ideas for students, a critical point for educators to consider is identifying systemic racism in school settings. Racism does not always incorporate itself through visible attacks. Frequently, racial discrimination poses subtle aggression that becomes customary among certain groups. As social interactions happen in classrooms, cafeterias, and teachers' lounges, we should ask ourselves: Are teachers attributing traits to students related to ethnic or cultural stereotypes? Are students' behaviors associated with their racial or ethnic groups? Are racial, ethnic, or linguistic segregationist behaviors present in the school cafeteria, teachers' lounge, or communal areas? Are individuals or groups of students given attributes or roles related to biological racist beliefs? Are our

assessments detrimental for Emergent Bilinguals despite their capabilities?

Educators should constantly renovate and reevaluate their ideas on their ever-changing journeys. By adopting an antiracist perspective, educators should self-reflect on indwelling actions about race and the innermost causes for their attitudes about racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, abandoning social construct biases about race and ethnicity to become antiracist educators in and out of school. These actions should lead to redeeming the necessary changes in favor of racial justice and equity. Therefore, Kendi's book is a true gem for teachers to self-reflect on their intrinsic

views to facilitate antiracist ideas for their students and promote racial equity.

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