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Empowering Students to Be Changemakers Activist Pedagogy in a Democratic School

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Abstract

Activist approaches to teaching resist neoliberal and white-centric approaches to education. Within such a framework, students can develop racial literacy and civic identity as activist citizens. In this case study of one classroom in a publicly funded democratic school, the teacher used activist pedagogy — an approach that directly engages young people with real-world injustices and supports them to take action — to weave together restorative pedagogy, racial literacy, and elements of critical race theory. The teacher's practices illustrate how these theoretical perspectives, when combined, can nurture students' sense of justice and equity. Drawing on classroom observations, interviews, and students' written/artistic works, the article highlights how children in a mixed-grade class (ages 9–11) used critical inquiry and activism to advocate for social change. Even within a neoliberal system of schooling, this study shows the potential of a holistic, activist-oriented framework to empower young people to see themselves as capable of transforming the world around them.



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In this article, I draw on an ethnographic study of my participant observation in one teacher's classroom located within a small, publicly funded, democratic school. The teacher's pedagogical choices centring social justice fostered her students' interest, deepened their engagement, and, most critically, shaped their identities as activist leaders. Through her approach, students not only recognized injustice but also developed the confidence to challenge hierarchies and advocate for justice. The school serves not only as an example of transformative education but also as a model for structural change. It demonstrates what is possible and shows how students can be empowered to participate in civic action at school.¹

A Day Begins

Broadway Public School² was an old brick building in the centre of a diverse metropolitan city in Southern Ontario. Broadway students and teachers mostly took public transit or walked to school; cars were rarely seen in the small parking lot. On a snowy winter morning, Emily, the teacher, waited in her classroom for her students to arrive. As they did, they greeted her with her first name: "Good morning, Emily," and grounded themselves in the space, waiting for everyone to arrive. Some sat and read, others chatted quietly, and others did handwork projects, such as knitting or crocheting. There was no bell. Between 9:00 a.m. and 9:30 a.m., the students entered with ease, not hurrying or running into the classroom, as is typical in more structured schools.

I knew Emily through the restorative justice and democratic educators' network in the city where we both lived. I had joined the class as a participant observer.

Emily began to draw a flower on the blackboard with a piece of chalk, in preparation for the lesson that day. Meanwhile, I helped the students put the chairs into a semicircle facing the blackboard, a typical seating arrangement for classroom discussions. As the students were making their way to their chairs, Emily excused herself, quietly saying to me, "I'll be right back. I want to check on Felicia. She's been going through a lot lately."

I took a seat in the circle with the others. Emily and Felicia soon also took their places. Any apprehension Felicia may have felt when she walked into the classroom seemed to have melted away after she was welcomed by Emily.

Emily clearly prepared her students for embodying her activist pedagogy in a context of nurturing and connecting with them first. She also fostered an environment that nurtured student activism by using interactive exercises, such as the "Power Flower," which drew the students'

¹ All names of people and places in this article are pseudonyms.

² Broadway Public School was founded in the 1980s by parents who were searching for alternatives to the traditional schooling system. They proposed it to the school board as a way to offer publicly funded education for students who would thrive by taking ownership of their learning. The curriculum emphasizes social justice and activist education and is grounded in a shared governance model among teachers, students, parents, and community members. Ever since the school opened, the teachers, parents, and students have made collective choices about what would support their democratic ethos. Parents have been part of the ongoing conversations and decision making within the school, from hiring teachers to developing a healthy snack menu. Historically, such publicly funded alternative schools have attracted families of higher socioeconomic status, often because they know about such alternative options or are connected with other similar-minded families (Mickelson et al., 2008; Roda & Wells, 2013). Broadway has consciously shifted from this approach, instead striving to prioritize the inclusion of diverse students who represent various historically marginalized identities, including racial and ethnic minority identities, LGBT2S+ students and families, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The school is run on a lottery system. Families apply and are only guaranteed entry when their names are chosen.

attention to the day's lesson about power, intersectionality, and justice. Such pedagogical moves connected theoretical knowledge with students' personal experiences, making abstract concepts tangible, while encouraging the students to reflect critically on their own positions within societal structures. As her lesson continued that morning, Emily's blackboard flower grew (see Figure 1).

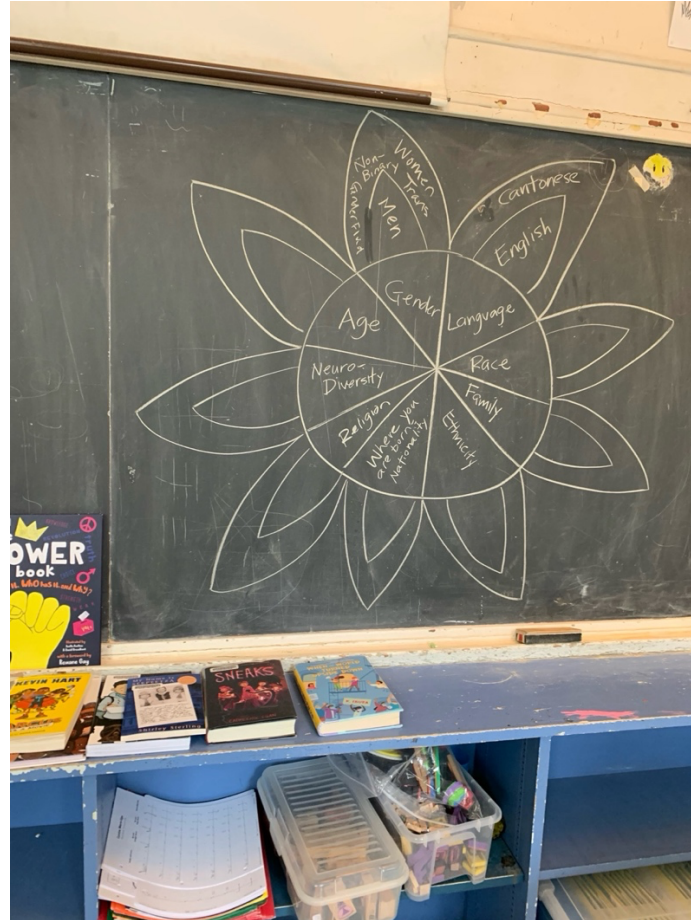


Figure 1. The Power Flower

First, she drew a big circle on the board and then divided it like a pie, writing different social identities in each slice. She then made two sets of petals surrounding the circle: one inner (signifying more power) and one outer (signifying less power). She asked her students to look at the board and invited them to consider a social identity to analyze. She used herself as an example, as a racialized woman who grew up speaking Cantonese before learning English, modelling how this positionality provided her with lesser power than the normative language. She invited students to pick another petal to consider.

Students raised their hands, wanting to consider gender. They identified gender identities that fell outside of the norm: gender fluid, nonbinary, woman, trans. Emily wrote them on the outer, less powerful, part of the petal. She asked what the inner, more powerful petal should be. Students called out with a resounding, “Men!”

Then, something shifted. The class became quiet. A female student, Audrey, got up and went to the board. “Maybe so,” she said, “but times are changing; I think it’s starting to look like this now,” and Audrey began to erase one side of the inner petal with her finger, blurring the line that divided the inner and outer part of the powerful and less powerful petals of the Power Flower. “This is because of our activism,” she continued. “Our generation is going to change things.” Her peers looked on, wide-eyed and nodding in enthusiasm, but also eerily quiet as they each actively listened to their peers share their rage that such a hierarchy even existed. Their discussion grew as they continued to deepen their allyship with each other, imagining paving another way.

Interrogating the Moment — Toward an Activist-Pedagogy Frame

Audrey countered the textbook definition of knowledge with lived experience, and the class rewrote power in their own vernacular, revealing the heart of activist pedagogy — an approach that blends critical race analysis with youth participatory action, explicitly cultivating students’ identities as agents of antiracist transformation (Kirshner, 2007, 2009). The Power Flower exchange captured more than a clever learning activity; it showed how Emily positioned students as emergent theorists of oppression and possibility. Thus, the lesson exemplified what Ginwright and Cammarota (2002, 2007) described as critical civic praxis: youth collectively naming inequities while rehearsing strategies for change.

Activist Pedagogy as an Integrative Lens

Activist pedagogy draws on CRT’s insistence that racism is endemic (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). It also draws on racial-literacy scholars’ call for reading, writing, and talking with and against structures of power (Sealey-Ruiz, 2021). In Emily’s classroom, these strands converge: students interrogate racial hierarchies, design counternarratives, and launch school-wide campaigns that fold learning into activism. My concept of an activist-pedagogy framework braids together critical race theory (CRT), racial literacy, and restorative justice. The subsections that follow highlight concepts as they clarify how Emily’s pedagogical moves generated antiracist action.

Restorative Pedagogy

Restorative pedagogy is an approach to teaching that fosters inclusive, trust-based learning environments by prioritizing relationship building, active listening, and shared accountability (Evans & Vaandering, 2022; Parker-Shandal, 2022). Restorative strategies encourage learners to address and redress harm, whether interpersonal or societal, through dialogue and collective problem solving (Reimer & Parker-Shandal, 2023). By placing emphasis on strong relationships and community-minded conversations, restorative pedagogy lays the groundwork for young people to engage with social issues, including racism and systemic injustice, in a manner that values empathy and collective responsibility (Winn, 2019).

Activist Pedagogy

Activist pedagogy involves engaging learners in the critical study of social injustices, guiding them not only to understand power structures but also to take meaningful action (Clay & Turner, 2021; Freire, 1970/2020; hooks, 1994). Central to activist pedagogy is the belief that students can be transformative agents in their schools and communities. Rather than focusing solely on learning “about” issues, activist pedagogy empowers learners to envision and enact

strategies for change — through writing campaigns, art, protests, or civic dialogues — that address the inequities they have identified (Brownell, 2022).

Racial Literacy

Racial literacy refers to a person's ability to read, interpret, discuss, and (when necessary) challenge racial dynamics in personal, institutional, or societal contexts (Chávez-Moreno, 2022; King, 2016; Skerrett, 2011). It goes beyond merely acknowledging that race is a social construct. Rather, it entails understanding how racial hierarchies operate and, through critical analysis and proactive engagement, it teaches learners how to confront everyday racism. Scholars such as Sealey-Ruiz (2021) have emphasized that racial literacy includes the empathic, relational, and intellectual capacity to unpack racial inequalities and to advocate for justice. Deep racial literacy is built through sustained, critical inquiry (Mentor & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021). It resists the superficial coverage implied in conflating any teaching about race with racial literacy (Chávez-Moreno, 2022).

Critical Race Theory

CRT examines how race and racism are deeply embedded in social systems and legal structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). A core tenet, *interest convergence* (Bell, 1980), describes how progress for marginalized groups often occurs only when it aligns with the interests of the dominant group. CRT provides a lens through which educators and students can interrogate the normative power structures that produce and reproduce racial hierarchies. While some CRT scholars incorporate an analysis of capitalism and class, connecting racism with economic exploitation, CRT itself is not uniformly anticapitalist. By centring the experiences of marginalized communities, CRT-based approaches can inform activist pedagogies that prompt young learners to question inequities and envision tangible solutions.

Theoretical Perspectives: Racially Literate Activists Challenging Neoliberalism

Integrating Critical Race Theory and Antiracist Education

Encompassing a broad range of skills and formats, literacy signifies the ability to interpret and create texts in multiple forms — traditional print media, digital and multimedia formats, and arts-based representations (Alvermann, 2008; New London Group, 1996). Effective communication and understanding currently require proficiency across various platforms and mediums that convey complex ideas and emotions, integrating visual, auditory, and performative elements (Eisner, 2002). Literature texts can be used to study societal systems of power, helping develop critical literacy even in very young children (Shaffer & Bedford, 2023). Focusing on building literacy skills increases confidence (Zenk et al., 2014).

Literacy has an active role in shaping racial awareness and understanding. Chávez-Moreno (2022) has highlighted the complexity of racial learning within a racist society. She distinguishes between hegemonic and counterhegemonic racial literacies — those that either reinforce or challenge racial ideologies. Racial learning, whether reinforcing or challenging racism, is a constant presence.

Racial literacy recognizes (and may challenge) systems that often penalize the less powerful. When navigating the justice system, young people well equipped with authentic and comprehensive racial literacy skills will understand the implications of policies, laws, and criminal

charges, and may go from there to work to address racism and discrimination by challenging unjust policies and practices.

Developing racial literacy aligns with activist pedagogy in its emphasis on the need for education that critically engages with race and racism to foster a critical racial consciousness capable of recognizing and acting against racial injustices (Falkner, 2024).

CRT interrogates power dynamics and social hierarchies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). Although CRT is not inherently anticapitalist, some scholars incorporate an anticapitalist lens. When taken up as an anticapitalist approach, CRT acknowledges that the neoliberal consciousness sees schooling as an economic enterprise. Those who revert to fear-based approaches to CRT dilute racism; they see it as an ordinary occurrence that should simply be accepted and moved on from (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6).

But Sealey-Ruiz's (2021) pivotal work on racial literacy shows how individuals can be educated about race and racism in a way that is both critical and empathetic. Her holistic approach fosters a nuanced comprehension of racial dynamics. Human flourishing is fostered within democratic systems that actively resist the constraints of the neoliberal capitalism that is deeply embedded in schooling structures and policies (Apple, 2018; Ginwright, 2016). Without systemic shifts that prioritize collective well-being, critical engagement, and social justice, education risks reproducing inequities rather than challenging them.

By intentionally not teaching from a place based on white knowledge, Emily sought to show her students how to disrupt racial hierarchies that centred white racial identities. She allowed and encouraged students to both identify and question the impact of race as a social construct — that is, race as a concept shaped by societal norms and power relations rather than an innate or natural fact (Frankenburg, 1993; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). In teaching her students that race was socially constructed, and not biologically determined, Emily challenged their conceptions of equality, and denormalized societal structures and interactions. Her teaching scaffolded the students' understanding of the structural impact of racism and inequity on students of colour in the very school they attended. For her and her students, it wasn't enough to merely point out that whiteness is a social construct upholding the power of an elite dominant class; they wanted to examine and disrupt how it operated in their own contexts.

For this researcher, an activist pedagogy must cultivate racially literate activist identities, equipping individuals to challenge the neoliberal constraints of educational systems and broader societal structures.

Recognizing and Resisting Neoliberal Ideologies: Activist and Restorative Justice Pedagogies

Transformative educational practices such as those practised by Emily foster student agency and autonomy in learning — and they also serve as a counterpoint to neoliberal and capitalist frameworks (Fielding, 2011). Such practices include student-centred, experiential, and activist learning taught using restorative justice and antiracist pedagogy.

By encouraging students to develop and deepen their political voices and perspectives, these practices enable students and teachers alike to navigate and push through structural constraints (Giroux, 2011; Kolb, 2015). For students, scaffolded efforts foster environments in which they can critically engage with the world around them, and from which they can actively pursue changes to traditional educational and economic systems (Anyon, 2014). For educators

implementing these changes, navigating traditional expectations requires flexibility, resilience, and a strong support network in order to prevent burnout (Goodlad, 1996; Gorski, 2019).

Activist pedagogies support students in recognizing gaps in their understanding while expanding and deepening their learning through critical engagement and inquiry. Restorative justice pedagogies encourage students to think critically about addressing social issues and taking action (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Parker-Shandal, 2022).

Building on restorative principles, activism is about being in community with others to create sustainable, lasting change without fostering a saviour complex (Angod, 2022; Chakravarty et al., 2020). A restorative approach shifts the dynamic from “us-versus-them” to a collective “we.” Because restorative justice practices empower individuals and communities (Evans & Vaandering, 2022), addressing harm becomes a shared responsibility. Activism, therefore, remains inherently relational. Bolstered by this relationality, students in activist classrooms critically engage with content and learn to see themselves as agents of change (Freire, 1970/2020; hooks, 1994). Emphasizing the importance of connecting classroom learning and real-world issues, activist pedagogy enables students to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to address and transform social injustices (Eizadirad et al., 2023; Picower, 2012).

Restorative justice pedagogies facilitate a collaborative approach for addressing conflicts and issues of harm. Thus, they provide a strong framework for teaching about activism. Restorative classroom discussions can include dialogue about conflicts and cultural diversity; circle processes, cooperative learning, role-play exercises, and interdisciplinary group work support this learning (Parker-Shandal, 2022). When young people experience connection in the classroom, they learn the confidence and skills that can permeate a school’s culture and empower them within their families. Their perceptions and feelings of connection are critical to their development as young activists.

Throughout history, activist student protests have highlighted the powerful role youth activism plays in advancing civil rights, environmental action, and global awareness, even in the face of opposition. Empowering young people to lead their own initiatives — by focusing on the issues that matter most to them and their communities — fuels their engagement in learning, strengthens their commitment to education (Cook-Sather, 2010; Mitra, 2008), and builds relationality (Pickard, 2022).

Students may be aware of social justice issues, but they often struggle to determine how to address these problems (Giroux, 2011; hooks, 1994). Some disengage due to a self- or socially imposed sense of inadequacy, or because of feeling overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of social injustices (Fine, 2018). Others may feel that their cup of social justice learning is already full, leading them to disconnect, consciously or unconsciously, because of feelings of powerlessness (Love, 2019). And when they do stand up for social causes, they are frequently met with punitive consequences, which discourage them from pursuits that could lead to greater equity, healing, and inclusion (Stovall, 2016; see “Discussion and Implications,” below, for more on this).

Neoliberalism positions education as an economic enterprise, often measuring success via competition, standardized tests, and other market-based metrics (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2011). In many schools, since educators must “teach to the test” or conform to rigid performance standards, teacher autonomy is constrained. Emily navigated these pressures by embracing activist pedagogy. She chose to emphasize relational trust, reflection, and meaningful discussion; she used her discretion to choose readings on youth activism; she incorporated arts-based projects; and she

created authentic civic engagement opportunities — all of which resisted narrow, test-oriented measures of achievement. Such activist choices were partly possible because Broadway granted greater teacher autonomy than more traditional schools did. Her pedagogical choices not only fostered deeper student engagement but also demonstrated the power of teachers' choice (operating at times through constraints) in advancing meaningful, justice-oriented education. Emily's practice exemplifies how activist pedagogy can serve as a restorative countermeasure to neoliberal constraints in public education.

Learning in a Democratic School: Connecting to Activist Teaching

At Broadway there were no single desks, only shared tables. A schedule on the wall loosely structured what students did. Monday through Thursday, they had math, arts, and writing/language blocks; Fridays were largely self-directed project time. The school's restorative culture and warm, relational climate emphasized shared decision making, first-name interactions between teachers and students, and an ethos of collaborative problem solving. For Emily, this environment aligned with her restorative and activist approaches, creating space for her to integrate circle discussions, trust building, and critical dialogues about injustice.

Emily's early check-in with Felicia showcased a restorative focus on relationships. Her relational foundation enabled her to dive into complex topics like power, race, and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) in a way that felt safe for learners. By starting the day in a circle, she disrupted hierarchical norms, implicitly reminding students that every voice mattered — an essential ingredient in activist pedagogy, where collective inquiry and collaboration are the foundation of meaningful action (Freire, 1970/2020). Drawing on CRT, Emily helped students identify how race was socially constructed. She leveraged that knowledge to unpack power inequities. By teaching that racism was not a series of isolated incidents but a product of systemic structures, she cultivated a deeper form of racial literacy.

Methodology and Pedagogy

Research Design

Over eight weeks, Emily implemented an emergent antiracist literacy unit. She implemented the unit in her mixed-grades class (Grades 4 to 6), where students ranged in age from 9 to 11. Her lessons aimed to guide students to learn about activism through antiracist education. The loosely planned curriculum unit involved reading activist literature, learning about youth-led and historical social justice movements, and creating a civic action project to facilitate change. Emily responded to her students' interests, letting them lead the way in terms of what they wanted to explore — by way of the civic action project and how they wanted to create it.

My role was that of a participant observer — sitting with students during circle discussions, assisting with small group activities, and debriefing with Emily after each lesson.

As a researcher, I identify as a racialized woman with a longstanding interest in anti-oppressive and restorative practices in education. My positionality allowed for rapport building with Emily and the students, particularly when unpacking race-related topics (Santamaría Graff & Boehner, 2019). Emily and I believed that this collaborative positioning would yield stronger data and results (Vanderbilt & Ali, 2020). I met with her several times before starting data collection. Our discussions focused on the school culture, her teaching philosophy, plans for the year, and ways in which she intended to create a literacy unit that focused on activism that emphasized racial

and social justice. Our racialized identities informed our discussions, facilitating our shared reflections and nuanced analysis of social issues.

As participant observer, I documented how students related to each other, and how their teacher's use of various restorative justice pedagogical practices created space for their understanding and engagement in social justice and equity. In my documentation and analysis of this class, I observed the multiple ways in which activism developed as students considered how to challenge injustice (DeBoer, 2020). They explored social justice theories, fostered allyship, and united in recognizing that intersecting oppressions reinforce systemic inequality. They studied diverse literary works, including novels and articles, that focused on activists and historical events.³ Emily encouraged her students to read and discuss narratives that challenged existing power structures and amplified marginalized voices (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003; Tatum, 2006). As part of their learning, students painted portraits of activists or created abstract art based on how they were feeling; visual arts thus became a powerful medium for expressing and communicating their perspectives on social issues (Dewhurst, 2014; Serafini, 2014; Sullivan, 2014).

Data Sources, Participants, and Analysis

Data were collected from eight classroom observations, five group interviews with a total of 23 students, three individual teacher interviews, and samples of students' writing and artworks.

After each observation, I recorded notes in my journal, documented emergent themes, and identified pedagogical interventions that I observed, both implicit and explicit (see Table 1). Implicit interventions were the ways in which the teacher encouraged various students to speak, through nodding, eye contact, gentle affirmation, and quiet conversations at individual students' desks. Explicit interventions included asking contentious questions, guiding students to ask critical questions and to interpret data in critical and antiracist ways (e.g., questioning how data would be documented for various reports).

Through this process, I identified various ways of teaching about antiracist and activism. My observations and analytical notes informed this thematic analysis, which highlighted how Emily taught activism, why certain strategies resonated with her students, and where tensions with neoliberal constraints arose. In Table 1, I discuss the critical pedagogical moves discerned from this thematic analysis, either emergent or planned, that supported students' activism and development of racial literacy.

Table 1
Critical Pedagogical Moves

EXPLICIT INTERVENTIONS		
Description	Classroom example	Relevant literature
Guide students to research activist figures. Teacher openly directs students to examine notable activists or social movements, encouraging them to investigate real-world examples of social change.	Teacher introduces historical and contemporary figures (e.g., Malala Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg) for students to research and present on. Students learn about the activists' missions, strategies, and obstacles, then connect these stories to their own experiences and civic actions.	Clay & Turner, 2021; Freire, 1970/2020

³ See the Appendix for the works students had the opportunity to choose from.

EXPLICIT INTERVENTIONS		
Description	Classroom example	Relevant literature
Structured classroom discussions on systemic injustice. Teacher deliberately organizes lessons or simulations to illustrate privilege, marginalization, and intersectionality.	In “Paper in Bin” simulation, students are placed at varying distances from a bin, representing unequal social positioning (front row vs. back row). They discuss how proximity to the bin parallels systemic advantages, then brainstorm collective solutions (e.g., moving the bin or helping peers).	Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023
Facilitate civic action projects. Teacher provides explicit instructions and resources for writing advocacy letters, planning protests, or organizing petitions.	A teacher-led letter-writing campaign to local government about water advisories on First Nations reserves. After reading about Indigenous activist Autumn Peltier, students collectively draft letters demanding policy changes, guided by explicit teacher feedback on persuasive writing.	Apple & Beane, 2007; Mirra, 2018
Assign arts-based activist tasks. Teacher designs structured art projects (posters, paintings, multimedia works) that explicitly address social justice issues, integrating both creative expression and political engagement.	Students create paintings of activists or design protest signs to share at a local demonstration. Teacher coaches them on composition, symbolism, and how visuals can convey powerful messages about equity and justice.	Dewhurst, 2014; hooks, 1994; Serafini, 2014
IMPLICIT INTERVENTIONS		
Nonverbal affirmations. Teacher offers encouraging gestures — nodding, smiling, eye contact — to validate student contributions on sensitive issues (e.g., discussing racism or personal experiences).	During a group circle on race-based bullying, teacher silently yet consistently makes eye contact, nods encouragingly, and leans in when students speak. Students feel supported to share openly, building trust and allowing deeper exploration of racial injustices.	Evans & Vaandering, 2022; Sealey-Ruiz, 2021
Arrangement of seating to invite dialogue. Teacher sets up circles or small clusters, subtly conveying an ethos of equality and shared responsibility for discussions around social and racial justice.	Placing chairs in a circle for daily check-ins ensures that all voices are visible and valued. This arrangement challenges hierarchical structures, aligning with restorative principles and supporting critical conversations about race or activism.	Freire, 1970/2020; Parker-Shandal, 2022
Prompt peer-to-peer support. Teacher unobtrusively encourages students to help one another (e.g., offering writing feedback or clarification), instilling relational accountability central to restorative and critical frameworks.	Instead of taking full control when a student struggles with an activist-themed essay, the teacher casually says, “Why don’t you two compare notes?” This gentle nudge fosters peer collaboration and relationship building to deepen their activist writing skills.	Giroux, 2011; hooks, 1994; Song & Swearer, 2016
Pause and ask “why.” Teacher uses strategic wait time and subtle questioning (instead of immediately providing answers) so students reflect on the deeper causes of social injustices and potential solutions.	During a heated class discussion on inequitable school funding, teacher simply asks, “Why do you think resources are allocated this way?” Then pauses. Students continue the discussion, linking classroom experiences to systemic funding inequities without constant teacher direction.	Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Ladson-Billings, 1995
Model empathy and active listening. Teacher’s attentive body language, gentle tone, and reflective restatements of student comments subtly demonstrate how to hold space for uncomfortable or emotional topics (e.g., discussing microaggressions or family immigration stories).	When a student recounts a microaggression they faced, the teacher quietly restates the student’s words to acknowledge them, maintaining eye contact and calm posture. The teacher’s implicit modelling helps students feel safe to delve deeper into critical racial conversations.	Daly, 2022; Noddings, 2015; Parker-Shandal, 2022

Emily's Pedagogical Approaches: Encouraging Students to Be Changemakers

Artmaking for Expression and Awareness

A central feature of Emily's classroom was artmaking as a form of activism (see Figure 2). One student, Avani, painted a portrait of Malala Yousafzai (Figure 3) after reading about Malala's girls' education activism. As I walked around the classroom, I asked Avani what she saw in Malala; she paused, and said, "She's a young person like me, and she risked her life so girls could go to school." This act went beyond mere aesthetics: the art project became an invitation to empathize with Malala's bravery and to amplify her message within the school context.



Figure 1. Students' Artwork in Process



Figure 2. Avani's Portrait of Malala Yousafzai

Letter Writing to Advocate for Change

Students honed their writing skills for real-world advocacy. Activist-oriented letter-writing exercises helped Emily's students learn about critical issues that mattered to them and encouraged them to write better, deepen their vocabulary, and be more persuasive so that they could effect change. One student, Nikhil, wanted to strengthen his literacy skills for his real-life purpose of using his writing for activism. After a lesson about climate change and learning about youth activist Autumn Peltier (born 2004), Nikhil wrote this response to the article they read as a class:

The article is about saving water because we are dumping garbage in the lakes. It affects the Indigenous and their [sic] walks to clean water. The main thing is to save mother earth. I feel like it's going super slow, and it is not going to get done in time before most water is contaminated. Then Indigenous people can't get clean water.

Nikhil's peers wrote similar responses, admiring Peltier's activism and agreeing with her message that everyone should have access to clean water. Emily asked her students to identify words in the article that were unfamiliar to them. Six students listed similar words, including *veteran*, *resilience*, *lieutenant*, and *sustaining*. The remaining nine students said, "I know them all," or "I understand everything."

Another student, Abby, motivated by her connection to her Métis heritage, chose to write a letter to the municipal government about a monument honouring the Northwest Mounted Police who died in the Northwest Rebellion in Saskatchewan of 1885. Abby questioned why there wasn't also a monument for the Métis and First Nations people who had also died. After her peers read the letter, they were eager to sign it too. Her activism not only served as a practical exercise in literacy and advocacy but also as a personal journey into family history and identity. Like others in their class, Abby and Nikhil merged their persuasive-writing projects with a critical consciousness, strengthening both their academic competency and their capacity to effect change.

Protest as Action

Emily underscored that activism also unfolds outside the classroom. In classroom discussions, she linked theoretical concepts to practical applications, showing students how protests had historically led to societal shifts and how the students could participate in or initiate similar actions. Avani proposed organizing a group presentation about Malala Yousafzai, turning individual admiration into a collective educational initiative that mirrored the dynamics of organizing a protest.

At the end of the school year, inspired by Abby's letter to the municipal government, students organized a small protest to commemorate Indigenous people who died in the Northwest Rebellion. This project integrated racial literacy (understanding and acknowledging historical oppression) with activist pedagogy (taking public, collective action). Abby's peers went to the local government office and protested, in homage to trailblazing Métis leader Louis Riel (see Figure 4). The students each made a moustache — an intentional reference to Louis Riel's moustache — for each of the 51 Indigenous people who died and for whom they argued a monument should be built. Their activism was fuelled throughout their literacy program from poems they read, such as "Activism Everywhere" by Mahogany L. Browne (see Figure 5) and discussions they engaged in. It focused on a commitment to not just learning about inequity but to doing something about it.

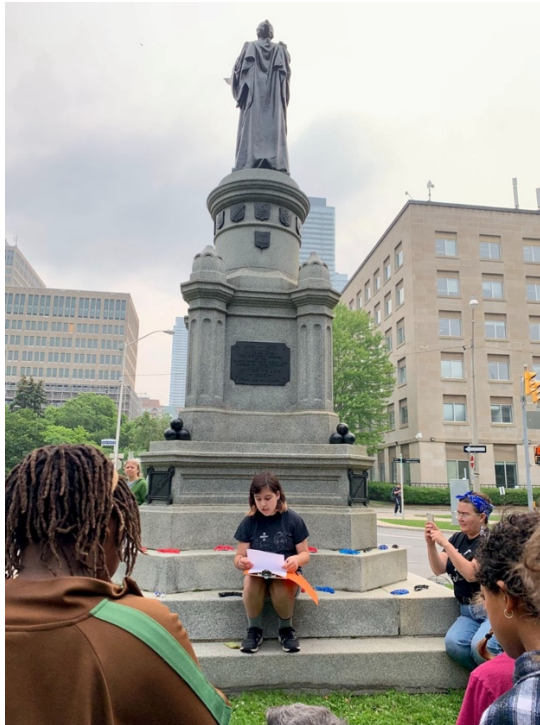


Figure 3. Student-organized protest

Note: The students placed the moustaches they made around the monument.

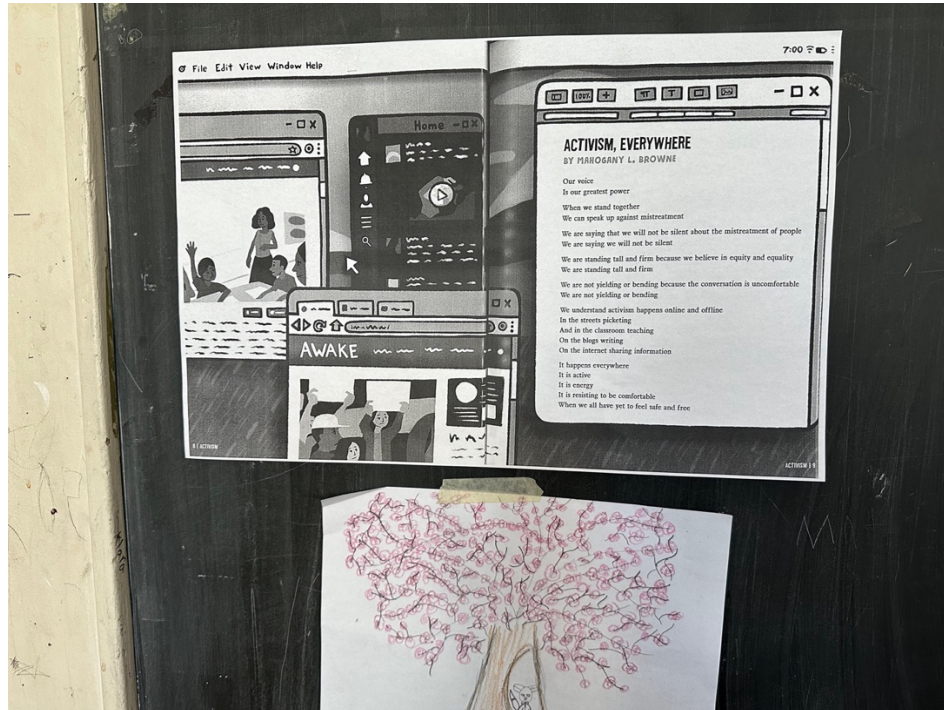


Figure 4. "Activism, Everywhere," by Mahogany L. Browne

Using Critical Problem Solving and Dialogue to Facilitate Activist Engagement

Emily's role as a facilitator was pivotal in redirecting the students' focus from passive learning to active involvement. She used a classroom exercise, "Paper in Bin," to discuss privilege, inequality, social justice, and systemic inequities. She arranged students in rows and instructed them to throw pieces of scrap paper into a bin. In this simple scenario, everyone who got their crumpled-up piece of paper into the bin would graduate from high school. It became obvious that those in the front row, closest to the bin, had more access. The activity was simple yet powerful. It illustrated how opportunities and barriers can affect people's ability to succeed based on their social positioning.

After the short simulation, Emily debriefed with her students:

Emily: Those of you that were in the back, I did ask you not to stand up, which you did, okay, I know you were trying to give yourself a leg up. ... I know, it's almost like you can't help yourself, right?

Ruby: It's just not fair! Like, I didn't even have a fair chance to graduate high school! [*Lots of students muttering, having side conversations*]

Kaiden: We were just trying to do the very best! [*Students continue to speak about the unfairness as Emily tries to quieten the class*]

Emily continued, saying: "What can you do for those 'born' at the back of the class without a clear shot at the basket?" She asked the students to redo the exercise to make it more equitable and then stepped back to let the students figure it out. Vicky got up and moved the bucket into the centre of the classroom; other students followed her lead and started to put the chairs around the bucket. One student intervened, "Hey, that's not an equal distance," and moved the chairs to make it equal.

Emily commended them, but then asked students to consider what they could do if they couldn't move the chairs. Tomas, who had been in the front row of the initial simulation, said: "We could take their paper and throw it for them." Some students nodded their heads, but then Vicky interjected: "But we don't want to be part of the system." Many students started murmuring in agreement, one saying that it's just "dumb luck if you're at the front." Nikhil responded back: "If you have money and go to a private school, you're more likely to get better grades and graduate because they have private tutors and better access." When one student started to respond, "Here's what I think," Emily paused the discussion to ask them "why" questions, such as, "Why do you think or feel this way?" She then asked them to connect what they were discussing in class to larger issues outside the classroom, intentionally using open-ended and critical facilitation questions. The exercise served to connect the metaphorical exercise to real-world actions like advocacy and support. The simulation illustrated for students the arbitrary nature of those born into privilege and the importance of allyship in creating equitable conditions.

In Emily's classroom, I observed that the students were both regulated and contemplative — even during moments of contentious conversations. In one class, she sought to dismantle any belief that race was biologically and scientifically constructed. She said, "Race, out of all of these social identities, is a social identity that's been made up. It's actually made up. It's not based on genetics." Students responded with their reflections on the concept of race and its visibility. Vicky, a white girl, shared: "We can see the skin, . . . we tell race by our skin colour, OK?" This opened

up discussions on racial identities and stereotypes. Abby, a Métis girl, reflected on the complexity in conflating race and appearance:

Race can also be confusing sometimes because I know that, like some people, can be mixed race but then have lighter skin colour. It can be like their religion.... Like, because I'm Métis and I'm Jewish, you could say that I'm mixed race even though I still have lighter skin colour. That's, like, that can be confusing sometimes because if you were to look at me, you probably won't think that I'm Indigenous, and so you can't really tell sometimes about race if you just look.

Emily addressed various misconceptions surrounding both race and religion, offering clarifications and encouraging students to engage more deeply with these topics. Several students shared their experiences with religious or racial marginalization during this discussion about identity. When Felicia, a Black student, recounted being targeted during a racist incident on public transit while on her way to school, a white female student responded, “Well, this might have just happened once.” Rather than shaming or shutting down the student, Emily used the moment to foster dialogue, prompting her to reflect on how dismissing these incidents as isolated events can further perpetuate harm. She also paused to affirm Felicia's experience and expressed empathy for having to navigate such a “horrific situation.” In a subsequent class, Emily brought in a report published by their school board showing data that Black students had lower graduation rates compared to non-Black students, linking the ideas of so-called “one-off” incidents to the broader context of systemic racism.

Pedagogical Approaches for Activism

Teaching for social justice and activism to activist-oriented students: More action, less talking. When I first joined Emily's classroom, Emily asked a group of three students to take me on a tour of the school. They walked me through various classrooms, excitedly showing me the art room and others. We paused in the dark basement of the old building that their school was housed in — an open area with small windows and furniture piled up. One of the students, Nikhil, engaged me in conversation:

Nikhil: This is where our Black Lives Matter group meets.

Researcher: Oh, you have a BLM group here.

Nikhil: Yeah, we do, but to be honest, I'm kinda over it. We talk about the same things. I know that stuff already. I want to learn how to write. Teach me about grammar and writing techniques now, so I could do something about this.

As we continued the tour, I remained moved by this student's plea for help — not to be an activist, but to learn how to write. He wanted the tools for writing a good sentence, because he knew that his social justice competencies would deepen as he engaged in advocacy campaigns. He voiced a desire to shift from theoretical knowledge to practical skills, particularly in writing and grammar, to advocate for social justice effectively. This sentiment underscores a crucial element of antiracism pedagogy: the need to balance awareness with skill building that empowers students to enact change. In short, Emily's student was not trying to convince himself or others that racism and inequity existed. He wanted to sharpen and deepen his literacy tools so he could engage in his own activism. As we continued on the tour, a South Asian student took the lead. He said:

In our school, we write about what we want to write about, and we write because we want to — here are our writing books. When we do the math, we stand up and go to different whiteboards. We work on the process of solving problems. Whether it's right or not doesn't matter to us.

A few weeks later, two other boys, one white, Pete, and one racialized, Nikhil, further took up this theme in our student group interview. Pete felt that it was necessary to keep having these conversations about racism because “it's not solved yet,” but Nikhil kept saying that he was “done talking about it.” Nikhil said he wanted to learn how to sound out words and how to focus on his writing style. He described wanting “real literacy” and felt that the focus on discussion alone was getting in the way. Pete challenged him: “But we're writing about those things in our literacy class.” Nikhil may have been dealing with antiracism fatigue, but he didn't deny that racism existed, and that it was a problem. He simply felt that talking about it endlessly wouldn't do anything. This interaction highlighted the diverse needs of students within an activist-oriented learning environment and the importance of addressing both the emotional and educational aspects of learning about racism.

A similar sentiment was shared by another student, a Black girl, Felicia, who felt that there was nothing she could do. “Who would listen to me?” Felicia questioned, in a kind of activist-oriented burnout, as she shifted her focus to her artwork. Coming to terms with systemic structural barriers signified that, for learning to persist, moving students into an activist-oriented stage was critical. Exposing students to this content and providing them with space to discuss it was only the beginning of the journey. Beyond student groups and writing assignments, movement into actionable steps that young people can take is critical for allowing the building blocks of racial justice literacy to persist outside of the classroom.

This process is challenging for teachers as well as students. They often experience their own form of activist burnout. For committed teachers, especially those ready to take on this demanding work, balancing strength and resilience in the face of burnout is crucial to fostering lasting change.

Pedagogical approach: Shape activists by demonstrating how change can happen. Emily's pedagogical approach was nuanced and adeptly tuned. By rapidly moving through theoretical discussions to focus on actionable steps like art creation, letter writing, protests, and virtual campaigns, she helped mitigate feelings of burnout, and empowered students to apply their knowledge in tangible ways. Through these experiential and arts-based activities, students transformed their theoretical knowledge into practical actions. The activities not only served as outlets for expressing their visions for change but also provided essential relief from the intellectual and emotional demands of studying systemic injustices.

Emily's strategy not only addressed the immediate educational needs of students but also cultivated a foundation for sustained activism and a deeper understanding of systemic racism. The students actively engaged with concepts of racism through both personal experiences and broader social perspectives. The school culture modelled a commitment to social justice and relational pedagogy. Students in Emily's class described their awareness of — and alignment with — building a strong community. The class's commitment to an inclusive culture was vital for fostering a deep, structural understanding of racism, enabling students to move from talking about racial injustice to envisioning and enacting a future without it.

Ultimately, Emily's classroom serves as an illustration of effective antiracism pedagogy. In such a classroom, students can learn to balance the cognitive load of understanding racism with active participation in societal change. The approach educates *and* empowers students, providing them with the tools and opportunities to become articulate, knowledgeable activists who are capable of leading meaningful change in their communities.

Nurturing students' activism: Connecting systemic issues and personal impact. Emily's approach to teaching intersectionality using visual tools like the "Power Flower" (Figure 1) was an effective method for illustrating the complex and interrelated aspects of identity, power, and privilege. Its analysis phase operationalized Kirshner's (2009) claim that activism is "iterative critical inquiry" (p. 47). Emily's Power Flower work primed students to diagnose the racialized surveillance of hoodies, for example, as a structural, not an individual, problem. This method helped students understand how various social categories — such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability — interact to perpetuate experiences of oppression and privilege.

Emily encouraged her students to consider and explore how intersectional identities influence their perspectives on heteronormativity. For example, as the weeks went on she drew successive "Power Flower" diagrams on the board to illustrate how identities such as language and gender intersect with broader societal power dynamics. One student noted the distinction between personal and social identities through language, explaining how different accents or dialects (like "Chinglish" or "Spanglish") can influence perception and social standing. This dialogue helped the students understand the layered nature of identity and encouraged them to consider how power is distributed across different social groups, emphasizing the realities of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991).

Emily's facilitation style was particularly effective in prompting students to think about systemic inequalities and their own roles in challenging these structures. A poignant moment in the discussion came when students debated the gender wage gap, highlighting the inequity in earnings between men and women:

Emily: So a few weeks ago, we talked about gender, and we talked about some inequities in gender, so who would you say of all the genders has the most power in the world in this petal?

Female student (white): Men.

Emily: Yes, so for every dollar a man makes, the global average is that a woman makes 75 cents. That's inequity. That's a problem.

This led to a broader conversation about the role of activism in narrowing this gap, demonstrating Emily's skill in guiding students to connect theoretical discussions with actionable insights. She prompted students to recentre the possibilities of activism and change-making:

Emily: The gap has been closing. Because of what?

Multiple students (calling out): Activism!

The class's engagement with these concepts was evidenced by their thoughtful responses and the depth of their discussions. Emily encouraged them in this, creating a classroom environment that was responsive to their needs; for example, she adjusted seating arrangements to facilitate better discussion and to allow students to express themselves freely. Her pedagogical approach not only supported critical thinking and engagement with difficult topics but also

empowered students to take ownership of their learning and to see themselves as capable of enacting change.

Actively engaging the students and inspiring them to think critically, Emily's approach strongly addressed existing ideologies and misconceptions about social justice. It effectively erased the line between student and activist.

Pedagogical approach: Facilitation of safe and reflective conversations about social identities and power. As part of her antiracist activist unit, Emily facilitated a compelling lesson on the real-world issue of water advisories on First Nations reserves, highlighting the activism of Anishnaabe rights advocate, Autumn Peltier. The lesson aligned with her educational goals of teaching about oppression and challenging students' preconceived notions formed by prevailing ideologies. By focusing on Peltier, Emily also aimed to demonstrate the impact of youthful activism and inspire a sense of agency among her students.

In the session, Emily employed an interactive true/false game to gauge the students' understanding of environmental rights and Indigenous issues, reinforcing the importance of critical engagement with real-world challenges. This method allowed students to articulate their knowledge and emotions about injustices. Many spoke their activist-oriented sentiments with enthusiasm, but also with concern, as in "Having clean water is a human right!"

Emily explicitly discussed the reasons for her pedagogical choices with her students:

Part of this work is showing how KIDS — like you — are standing up and making a difference. We're going to learn about kids who are taking action. Still, Autumn is now 18. Yeah, she's 18, and she's still talking about these issues. She's been an activist since she was young.

Emily's focus on Autumn Peltier and the real-world issue of water advisories on First Nations reserves served to inspire activism and a sense of agency among the students.

Becoming activists: Artmaking, letter writing, and protest. As Emily's antiracism education unit progressed, she guided her students through a variety of activities centred on activism, emphasizing the transformative power of artmaking, letter writing, and protest. This approach highlighted individual and collective agency in the classroom, offering direct pathways for students like Nikhil and Latifa to engage. In their interviews, many students said that people knew about BLM, but didn't really talk about how to address the underlying issues. They had met Emily's goal of moving from being recipients of information to critical engagement, which enhanced their choices to work towards doing something about the issues. A mixed-race female student shared this sentiment:

I feel like most people know, like, "oh yeah, Black Lives Matter," but they don't actually like, understand "What's it about?" "How do I help?" "What is it?" This kind of thing. . . They don't, like, know what it's about or how to help and stuff. They don't know much about it.... They just know that it exists. 'Cause the more people understand why things are a problem the better, because, like, if people just stop doing it, and get to the issues.

The Challenge of Neoliberalism

Emily had the freedom to make activist pedagogical choices, yet she was still operating within the confines and constraints of a neoliberal system of schooling that did not allow for a

truly activist-oriented pedagogy to flourish. Her freedom was limited. Pursuing activist teaching in the midst of bureaucratic, financial, and state testing demands creates internal challenges that compromise teachers' pedagogical choices and students' learning (Rubin et al., 2017). Many teachers begin on an activist path but later step back, often feeling isolated or discouraged by institutional pressures that frame activism as a deviation rather than an integral part of education (Clay & Turner, 2021; Liou & Rojas, 2020). They are left to believe they have stepped too far, done too much; in the end, many burn out (Gorski & Chen, 2015). Yet, as Ginwright (2016) argued, youth activism in schools is essential for reimagining education as a space for healing, resistance, and collective empowerment. Without structural shifts that challenge the constraints of neoliberal capitalist systems embedded in schools, truly human flourishing and democratic engagement remain out of reach.

In most educative contexts, neoliberalism undermines equity and public good. Through practices such as standardized assessments and privatization of education, it prioritizes market-driven policies, competition, and individual achievement (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2011; Llewellyn & Parker, 2018). Neoliberal approaches to education diminish teachers' efforts to connect relationally (Llewellyn & Parker, 2018; Ragoonaden & Kitchen, 2019). Too often, such approaches also stifle young people's agency — as adults either take control of the process or restrict the ways in which students can engage (Fielding, 2004; Oto, 2023).

Any antiracist or restorative approach to teaching that is done through a neoliberal education model ultimately serves to preserve whiteness. Activist pedagogies such as Emily's push back against neoliberalism, challenging the reliance on interest convergence (Kellner & Kim, 2010), in which social progress for marginalized groups occurs only when it aligns with the interests of the dominant group, thereby preserving existing power structures (Milner, 2008).

Critical educators in democratic learning spaces challenge neoliberal ideologies by employing pedagogical approaches that cultivate critical awareness (Freire, 1970/2020). They foster dialogue and build inclusive communities that value the unique perspectives of every student, particularly those who are racialized and those with marginalized identities (hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Such educators are well positioned to resist neoliberal influences and transform their instructional practices by adopting activist, equity-focused teaching approaches. They recognize and leverage students' existing funds of knowledge while adapting to their evolving needs (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Giroux, 2011; Timperley et al., 2014).

Activist teaching can force a more critical reorientation of how certain issues in the classroom are approached. When implemented from a critical perspective, restorative justice pedagogies — rooted in an awareness of how hierarchical structures impact educational outcomes — can contribute to strong relationships and healthy communities that support democratic learning (Parker-Shandal, 2022).

Discussion and Implications: Considerations for Broadening and Deepening Students' Support and Capacity for Justice

Not everyone will approach activist teaching with a focus on equity and racial justice. However, centring CRT and antiracism is crucial for activist work to achieve true equity and inclusion. When antiracism is co-opted by elites, it often manifests as a capitalist enterprise. Therefore, antiracism must be intricately intertwined with anticapitalism to maintain its integrity and effectiveness. This necessary interconnection ensures that our efforts address the root causes of systemic inequality.

Activist pedagogy—led discussions about race, equity, and social justice, like Emily’s, engage students, allowing them to disrupt hegemonic narratives and interrogate multiple perspectives. In addition, deepening racial literacy enhances students’ reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, preparing them to act as informed citizens in a diverse and complex society. While promoting a deeper understanding of and engagement with the texts they encounter, activist-oriented pedagogical strategies advocate for a more inclusive and reflective classroom environment that mirrors the realities of students’ lives and the wider world.

Daly (2022) has emphasized the educator’s role in facilitating race-related discussions. She has identified “race-talk moves,” such as distancing and denying, that expose barriers to productive dialogue, and has underscored the need for intentional conversations that keep students engaged, deepen their awareness, and empower them to see antiracism as personally relevant. Without meaningful and deep deliberation of issues, students can easily lose interest, see antiracism through an abstract lens, and ultimately dismiss the reality of racism and oppression. With deeper awareness, students can identify what they can do and what they can contribute as young people — and be encouraged to consider how such learning is meaningful and relatable to their lives.

Activist teaching in social-justice-focused, democratic schools is an intentionally provocative approach that may challenge deep-seated neoliberal ideologies. This method of teaching may even be deemed “too radical” by those who identify as equity warriors but who ultimately protect their privilege through white liberalism. It pushes the boundaries towards transformative inclusion. The reconceptualization of racial literacy necessitates embodied and deeply empathetic connections through a restorative approach to teaching about activism and antiracism, urging educators and scholars to embrace a comprehensive and critical perspective on the role of the activist teacher (Crenshaw, 1989; Daly, 2022).

Not all educational settings are democratic schools, but this case study demonstrates how it is possible for students in publicly funded systems to also act as democratic agents in their own education. Reflective classroom environments in which students critically navigate complex social issues like racism, religion, and systemic injustice through proactive engagement and empowerment are called for. Such engagement is vital for building their social, emotional, and academic literacy. It enables them to delve deeper into curricular topics and actively participate in shaping their learning experiences (Freire, 1970/2020; Giroux, 2004).

Emily’s intentional use of dialogic pedagogies, drawing on principles of antiracism and restorative justice, led her to use community-building circles in classrooms to help foster inclusion and belonging, ensuring that her students’ voices were heard and valued. Students examined inequities documented within the school board and recognized broader social implications. In doing so, Emily aimed to empower them with both the language (literacy) and the sociopolitical insight (activism) to challenge racism in their daily lives. This practice, coupled with dynamic exploration in the classroom of pressing societal issues, reflected conversations in the broader outside world, reinforcing the classroom’s role as a societal microcosm (hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Emily’s methods underscored the significance of weaving together activism, literature, and the arts to forge a curriculum that equipped her students to challenge dominant ideologies and navigate a complex and interconnected global landscape (Giroux, 2004; hooks, 1994). Her approach sought to foster connections not only within the school community but also beyond it, extending into society, encouraging students to engage as informed, active citizens capable of influencing broader social change.

For the racially literate activist — whether educator or student — pedagogical engagement hinges on meaningful content closely linked to equity and social justice (Morrell, 2015). This linkage showcases how systemic and structural change, driven by students' desires for engaging and relevant educational experiences, can possibly be achieved. This perspective underscores the need for curriculum development and teacher training relevant to empower students and deepen their capacity for justice (Meier, 2002; Tatum, 2006).

It also illustrates a shift in how information may be consumed and acted upon by young people invigorated by social issues. In both historical and contemporary contexts, when students develop an activist lens and engage in efforts to “do something” to address social injustices, they are often met with punitive responses (Ginwright, 2009; Love, 2019). Activism that aims to defend human rights, stand in solidarity with marginalized communities, and question the social order should not be perceived as disruptive or in need of correction. Instead, these tendencies should be nurtured so that young people can develop the capacity to critically interrogate and resist harm (Freire, 1970/2020).

Emily's class at Broadway Public School exemplifies how restorative pedagogy, racial literacy, critical race theory, and activist pedagogy can converge within a democratic school structure to empower students. By teaching them to interpret systemic injustices and providing them with concrete avenues for action, Emily demonstrated the transformative potential of youth activism. The larger neoliberal context can stifle or misinterpret such work, but this case study illustrates a promising possibility: when teachers and students collectively refuse to see schooling as merely a market-driven endeavour, they create space for genuine engagement, empathy, and societal change.

Nurturing racially literate, civically engaged students is not a one-off project. Sustained effort is required. Scaffolding students' activist efforts should be the priority — not silencing them, so as to recentre whiteness or maintain the status quo (Love, 2019). Even in a setting designed for openness and dialogue, tensions and fatigue can arise. Yet, these very challenges emphasize the urgency of refining activist pedagogy. By actively confronting systemic power dynamics in race, class, and beyond, educators can help young people cultivate the critical skills and courage to stand for social justice. In centering youth voice and relational practice, Emily's classroom reimagines what education for justice can look like. Ultimately, the essence of a democratic, activist education is that students do not only learn about the world: They learn to transform it.

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Appendix: Young Adult Antiracist Books

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Browne, M., Acevedo, E., & Robinson, O. A. (2020). *Woke: A young poet’s call to justice*. Roaring Brook Press.

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Craft, J. (2019). *New kid*. Quill Tree Books.

Craft, J. (2020). *Class act*. Quill Tree Books.

Crawford, I., & Walker, S. (2023). *Welcome to Blackhurst*. Blackhurst Cultural Centre.

Dias, M. (2018). *Marley Dias gets it done: And so can you!* Scholastic.

Draper, S. M. (2018). *Blended*. Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books.

Dupuis, J. K., & Kacer, K. (2016). *Gaawin Gindaaswin Ndaawsii / I am not a number*. Second Story Press.

Ewing, E. (2021). *Maya and the robot*. Kokila.

Hale, N. (2015). *The underground abductor (Nathan Hale’s hazardous tales #5)*. Amulet Books.

Hart, K., & Oswald, G. (2021). *Marcus makes a movie*. Crown Books for Young Readers.

Hiranandani, V. (2021). *How to find what you’re not looking for*. Kokila.

Jewell, T. (2022). *The anti-racist kid: A book about identity, justice, and activism*. Versify.

Kendi, I. X., & Reynolds, J. (2023). *How to be a young anti-racist*. Kokila.

Marks, J. (2020). *From the desk of Zoe Washington*. Katherine Tegen Books.

Rhodes, J. P. (2018). *Ghost boys*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

Robertson, D. A. (2020). *The barren grounds*. Puffin Canada.

Saeed, A. (2022). *Omar rising*. Nancy Paulsen Books.

Saunders, C., Buckthorn, G., Salami, M., Scarlet, M., & Songhurst, H. (2020). *The power book: What is it, who has it, and why?* Ivy Kids.

Sekaran, S. (2021). *The samosa rebellion*. Katherine Tegen Books.

Shackleton, C. (2018). *Trailblazers: Black pioneers who shaped Canada*. Scholastic Canada.

Sterling, S. (1992). *My name is Seepeetza*. Groundwood Books.

Stone, N. (2021). *Fast pitch*. Crown Books for Young Readers.

Warga, J. (2019). *Other words for home*. Balzer + Bray.

Yang, K. (2018). *Front desk*. Scholastic.

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