

The Intersection of 6 Stages of White Identity Development, Curricula Materials, and Holistic Education: Barriers and Solutions

Shardea Gallion and Alexa Obregón

E-mail: shardea@luminatedleaders.com; aobregon76@gmail.com

Received March 2025

Accepted for publication March 2025

Published July 2025

Abstract

In this article, the authors will pull from research-based best practices and work supporting districts with the implementation of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) to address the overwhelming need to center discussion around students' cultural, racial, ethnic, and/or linguistic identity, embracing a truly holistic education approach. The article will explore how a successful implementation of curriculum materials can only occur when we prioritize *all* students receiving equitable instructional opportunities. It will also identify common barriers and solutions educators at all levels of the system must be willing to grapple with to move toward not only more equitable student outcomes but a more equitable educational structure. The authors will specifically consider: what factors may impede an inclusive implementation for students of color and emergent bilinguals, and how can educators address those barriers?

Specifically, we will explore how educators can:

- strategically design professional learning that supports conversation, with the goal of cultivating culturally responsive communities and practices;
- create brave spaces that invite stakeholders to embrace discomfort;
- encourage teachers to examine the advantages of Whiteness and consider what they are willing to sacrifice; and
- understand how instructional materials may be designed to perpetuate marginalization.

Pulling from Beverly Daniel Tatum's 1994 article, "Teaching White Students about Racism: The Search for White Allies and the Restoration of Hope" and Janet Helm's model of White racial identity, as discussed in Tatum's work, this article will dive into the 6 stages of White racial identity (e.g., contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independent, immersion/emersion, and autonomy) and how these stages directly impact the implementation of HQIM.

The authors will discuss each of these barriers and offer a myriad of solutions to support educators in raising their racial consciousness, equipping them with the ability to lead instruction with an awareness of all student's collective and individual identities.

Keywords: *inclusive education, HQIM, racial healing, culturally responsive pedagogy, curriculum implementation, revision*

Introduction

Across the nation, curriculum materials deemed high quality are gaining traction in how they can improve student outcomes and increase opportunities for equitable instruction. Initial reports support the ongoing adoption and implementation of these materials. However, few of those articles address three necessary aspects: the purpose for high-quality instructional materials, the work of implementing those materials, and the ability to do this work through an equity lens—which addresses students' sense of belonging and representation in and out of the materials, culturally and linguistically, and develops a space for being seen and accepted. Even less consideration has been made in how schools can approach this work from a holistic educational philosophy. Through our work, we have intentionally centered conversations around equity across stakeholders, focusing on their personal understanding of bias, racism, and representation and how that surfaces both in the selection and use of educational materials. These remain especially critical conversations as even today 80% of public-school teachers are White (Will, 2020).

The 6 Stages of White Identity Development , Curriculum Materials, and Holistic Education

As explored in Beverly Daniel Tatum's article, "Teaching White Students about Racism: The Search for White Allies and the Restoration of Hope," White educators have two primary tasks: 1. "Abandonment of individual racism" and 2.

"recognition of and opposition to institutional and cultural racism" (Tatum, 1994, p.1). We will explore how school systems engaging in the process of adopting and using new curricula can recognize and explore the intersection between Janet Helm's six stages model of racial identity and possible barriers and solutions school districts may encounter.

Tatum relies on Helm's 6 stages of racial identity described below:

1. **Contact**—minimal attention paid to one's own racial group/Whiteness
2. **Disintegration**—a budding awareness of how one's life as a White person and the lives of people of color are affected by racism
3. **Reintegration**—looking for explanations of racism from the individuals who are the target of racism (i.e., people of color) which allows for the White individual to be reduced both of the responsibility for change and possible feelings of guilt
4. **Pseudo-independent**—active seeking of relationships with people of color in an effort to distance themselves from social pressures
5. **Immersion/emersion**—active work to create a positive definition of being a White person through the seeking of White role models who "provide examples of non-oppressive ways of being White"
6. **Autonomy**—fully defined view of one's Whiteness is internalized and part of a definition of self

Tatum explains how for many White individuals, their identity can be defined in three categories which do little to propel schools to more anti-racist systems, policies, materials, and modes of operating. The models of “white supremacist,” “What whiteness?” and “guilty white” leave little impetus for White educators to drive change (Tatum, 1994, p. 5). Instead, Tatum proposes a fourth model of the “white ally” (Tatum, 1994, p. 5). As schools that employ holistic education practices move toward providing equitable instructional opportunities, it is imperative that White educators, both individually and collectively, envision themselves as a White ally *and* actively work toward becoming and operating in that model. This identification and subsequent work can support stakeholders in educational systems in becoming “agents of change” (Tatum, 1994, p. 7). Thus, improving outcomes for all students, especially for students of color and emergent bilinguals, and more profoundly embracing a truly holistic educational approach.

Both the 6 stages of White identity development and the corresponding White identity categories have direct connections to the primary themes of a holistic educational approach. In holistic education, there are foundational beliefs around a shared responsibility in the welfare of others, an importance in building relationships, and a need to foster a sense of community. These beliefs should drive the work of schools operating within the tenets of the holistic approach in terms of how they run, the materials they use, and the explicit work educators do to understand their own Whiteness.

Additionally, foundational to this work—both in the development through the 6 stages of White identity development and the use of a holistic education approach—is the need for all stakeholders (i.e., leaders, educators, students, community members) to devote themselves both to developing a positive racial identity and growing

their socio-political consciousness. We venture to say that a school cannot truly be working with a holistic approach unless the educators in that school are exploring their own Whiteness and the privilege it affords. How can White educators truly be holistic if they aren’t identifying and incorporating non-oppressive ways to care for others, build relationships, and create community? Most schools speak to vision and mission statements, elevating a desire for their students to be successful in a global society, but what is often missing is the very intentional personal work that must be done for this vision to be achieved.

Barriers and Solutions

As districts across the nation consider the adoption and use of new curricula materials, stakeholders should simultaneously be engaging in the previously neglected conversations referenced above. As a White ally, educators need to elevate two conversations. First, how do these materials represent the students in my classroom? Second, how do these materials allow for my homogenous student body to learn about and dispel possible stereotypes of others; racially, culturally, linguistically, and ethnically? A third consideration, specifically for educators employing holistic educational approaches, is how do these materials and the manner in which I implement them align to holistic beliefs and goals?

By supporting districts across the country, we have identified several key barriers and begun to unearth suggestions and solutions to support students of color and emergent bilinguals in reaping the full benefits of educational materials, a successful implementation, and a holistic educational approach. The barriers and solutions identified could be applicable in moving through the 6 stages of Whiteness while embracing and implementing a holistic educational approach.

Barrier: Lack of representation in materials racially, culturally, and linguistically

Solutions:

- **All stakeholders should:**
 - Adopt a common language that honors the humanity and contributions of people of color (i.e., slave vs. enslaved person, English language learner vs. emergent bilingual)
 - Understand how instructional materials may be designed to perpetuate marginalization and address this narrative, both in the texts chosen and in how they are taught (i.e., decenter dominant culture as the standard narrative)
 - Identify areas where history may be Whitewashed/sanitized
 - Create opportunities for families to share their histories, experiences, customs, and traditions, ensuring relevancies for all students
 - Prominently display high-quality artifacts and positive images of cultures represented throughout the student body and learning materials
 - Display colorized images of historical events and figures when possible to foster empathy and connection
- **Leadership should:**
 - Create tools to identify subpar representation (i.e., representation trackers based on unit/modules, texts, authors, and grade levels)
 - Reach out to publishers for insights and additional supports
- **Educators should:**
 - Explicitly identify when contributions and perspectives of members of the community and/or certain groups are not represented in materials

- Encourage and nurture discussions around differences, particularly in race, language, and ethnicity
- Allow for students to critically reflect on their own culture, assumptions, biases, and beliefs
- Create opportunities for students to question the status quo: looking at lessons and perspectives from various viewpoints and interrogating the social, political, and economic forces that

Barrier: Lack of a culture of trust to provide space for vulnerability and learning

Solutions:

- **All stakeholders should:**
 - Community agreement that propels stakeholder to embrace discomfort and non-closure while actively engaging in brave spaces
 - Initiate an educator's journey through the 6 stages of White identity development to interrogate their racial socialization, recognize their unconscious biases and privileges, and unearth the unconscious ways they are complicit in the racist systems
 - Prioritize relationship building and elevation of voices of color
 - Lean into the holistic education approach of strong student-teacher relationships, forging safe, nurturing communities

Barrier: Technical factors that prevent collaboration, conversation, and reflection

Solutions:

- **Leadership should:**
 - Prioritize and design a professional learning calendar that is centered on

confronting biases, racism, personal growth, and reflection

- Review class and specialists' schedules to ensure that students are not pulled from Tier 1 instruction
- Design schedules to allow for collaborative planning to occur across grade levels and specialists
- Create a walkthrough tool that focuses on equity and use on regular basis providing feedback not only on instruction but on equity indicators
- Systematically design opportunities to examine the intersection between holistic education and equity

Barrier: Historical contexts that permeate and persist leading to policies, systems, and mindsets that fail to center students of color, emergent bilinguals, and other marginalized groups

Solutions:

- **Leadership should:**
 - Strategically design professional learning that provides clarification in language to support conversation, with the goal of cultivating culturally responsive communities and practices
 - Examine and revise instructional vision as needed to ensure it centers equity alongside holistic educational practices
 - Encourage educators to examine the advantages of Whiteness and consider what they are willing to sacrifice
 - Guide stakeholders through The Leadership Academy's Equity Self-Assessment to identify areas of growth and bright spots
 - Center the welfare of others in conversations, creating a belief of shared responsibility for *all* students

Barrier: Limited racial consciousness impedes educators' ability to cultivate culturally responsive communities and practices

Solutions:

- **All stakeholders should:**
 - Not only prioritize but create norms and/or community agreements that reinforce a commitment to ongoing engagement and knowledge building to support crucial cultural conversations and holistic practices
 - Prioritize truly getting to know students at a deeper level; confront cultural, racial, and linguistic atrophy that leads to inaction
- **Educators should:**
 - Utilize Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to collaboratively review materials, identify personal experience and knowledge gaps, and exchange resources within the tenets of holistic educational beliefs, practices, and approaches

Implementation Best Practices

In our direct work with districts, we utilize Rivet Education's Instructional Materials Implementation Tool to support system leaders in significantly improving learning and instruction (2024). Implementation science suggests that people move through a series of nonlinear, but relatively predictable stages, when implementing a new program, including new instructional materials. The Implementation Tool outlines the key actions that educators at each level of the system—district, school, and classroom—should focus on during each stage, thereby turning an overwhelming process into bite-sized pieces.

Exploration of Materials:

1. Start with a vision for effective and equitable instruction in alignment with a holistic approach.
2. Make sure the educators who will be responsible for using these materials are at the selection table.
3. Make sure to provide the review committee with the professional learning tools they need to select the best curriculum for your district.
4. And lastly, don't rush the process.

Program Installation:

1. Invest stakeholders in the new curriculum.
2. Ensure teachers have enough time to receive meaningful, initial training on their HQIM and explore how the HQIM aligns to holistic educational approaches.
3. Set and communicate clear expectations for implementation.

Initial Implementation:

1. Prepare for speed bumps and roadblocks.
2. Have a plan to monitor implementation.
3. Provide teachers and leaders with ongoing support.
4. Celebrate and share successes.

Consistent Implementation:

1. Regularly assess the quality of HQIM implementation using multiple data such as classroom observations, school walkthroughs, assessments, teacher feedback, and student work.
2. Execute a comprehensive, curriculum-based professional learning plan, including collaborative planning time and coaching, to support teachers' and leaders' skillful use of HQIM.
3. Shift ownership of curriculum implementation to school leaders, who will

later shift ownership to coaches and teacher leaders.

Innovation and Sustainability:

1. Share leadership of routines and processes for supporting implementation with teachers and teacher leaders.
2. Continue monitoring implementation data to build off achievement gains and proactively address areas of implementation that are not meeting a high bar for quality.

To ensure that all students receive equitable access to high quality instruction, holistic educators must ensure that their curriculum implementation of activities, routines, structures, and professional practices are culturally responsible. As there are limited curriculum implementation frameworks available that seamlessly interweave racial equity and best practices, it would be advantageous to customize an existing science-based framework. From our consulting experiences, we've come to understand that racial-equity-focused implementation frameworks are still under development. However, holistic educators mustn't wait for those resources to be developed. Take ownership of your current tools by noticing where additional consideration and action is required to ensure racial equity and seek out resources to help you develop an inclusive approach.

Example:

During the exploration stage, ensure there's diversity and representation across stakeholder groups to provide a wide range of perspectives and ensure consideration is given to voices that have been historically and systemically excluded. Be intentional about honoring and elevating People of Color's contributions.

Committing to this work will, undoubtedly, require an ongoing and active effort. However, to embrace holistic education is to embrace this necessary process. After all, successful implementation requires initial and ongoing work centered around equity that's woven into every step of the work. And having a strong vision statement rooted in equity can serve as a north star to guide future decisions. Threaded across each stage of Rivet's implementation is the recommendation to establish, communicate, and frequently reference a "vision of excellent, equitable instruction" (Rivet Education, 2024). Vision setting is the best starting place for a district looking to align itself with equity-centered practices and subsequently customize an implementation tool.

As districts engage in implementation across these stages and drive towards this vision of equitable instruction, it is imperative they do this work alongside reviewing the 6 stages of White identity development and the philosophical beliefs of holistic education for the benefit of all students. In other words, none of these education beliefs (i.e., successful implementation, development along 6 stages, holistic education) can occur in isolation from each other. The successful implementation of materials requires a commitment to engage in both: improving teachers' pedagogy while simultaneously engaging in the vital personal work of understanding the privileges of Whiteness in and out of a holistic educational context.

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Author Bios

Alexa Obregón designs, presents, and supports professional learning in research-based instructional practices in literacy and for multilingual learners. Previous roles include bilingual classroom teacher, reading specialist, interventionist, and state literacy liaison. Currently, she works as a consultant, centering the implementation of high-quality instructional materials to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Alexa's passions include literacy instruction, equity, change management, and examining professional learning to drive changes in teacher and student outcomes. She holds a Bachelor of

Fine Arts from the University of Texas, Austin, and a Masters of Reading from Texas A&M University.

Shardea Gallion is the founder of LuminatED, a consulting practice specializing in leadership coaching, HQIM implementation guidance, cultural competency training and customized professional development design and facilitation. She has extensive experience driving meaningful literacy improvements across an array of state, district and education policy initiatives. Shardea is a fierce advocate for vulnerable and underrepresented communities. Her human-centered work equips leaders to foster and sustain inclusive and high-quality learning environments for *all* students.

Shardea earned a Bachelor of Journalism in Broadcasting from the University of Nebraska Lincoln and a Masters of Secondary Education from the University of Missouri-St. Louis.