Anti-Racism Collaborative: Shifting from Outcome to Process in Implementing and Measuring an Organizational-Change Effort

Nayoung Jang, Sherry K. Watt, Duhita Mahatmya, William Coghill-Behrends, and Milad Mohebali

Introduction

Action plans are one of the most adopted anti-racism efforts in higher education. However, rushing toward action plans may imply that racism can be solved. Despite their utility, action plans "list outcomes, name strategies, and (re)assign people within the current structures rather than disrupt how the current system operates" (Watt & Multicultural Initiatives Consortium, 2020). This focus on outcomes interferes with thoughtful, long-term processes that are necessary to support and sustain individual and organizational change because transformation is a continual process. Thus, the Anti-Racism Collaborative (ARC) within the University of Iowa's College of Education applied a process-oriented approach to anti-racism initiatives.

A process-oriented approach acknowledges that as society changes, structural inequities also evolve; there is no single solution

that can fix enduring social problems. Compared to outcome-focused ("doing") approaches that prioritize the display of results that may or may not represent a lasting change in the organization, a process-oriented ("being") approach gives priority to individual reflection and meaning-making of community discussion to align thoughts, feelings, and actions toward sustainable systemic change. A process-oriented approach places priority on "how" to be in conversations with others about complex issues, like racism, in a community while not excluding the importance of "what" outcome the community wants (Watt et al., 2022). This paper aims to describe how ARC applies a process-oriented approach toward anti-racism. We will first describe the theoretical framework underpinning ARC, the theory of Being. Then we will describe how we implemented process-oriented research methodology to explore how best to measure its impact on individuals. We will finally provide what we learned from the evaluations and discussion.

Describing and Applying the Theory of Being

The theory of Being describes personal, relational, and community ways of Being practices that prepare participants to engage in difficult dialogues by developing the stamina to wrestle with complex social problems (Watt et al., 2022). Difficult dialogue is defined as "a verbal or written exchange of ideas or opinions between citizens within a community that centers on an awakening of potentially conflicting views of beliefs or values about social justice issues (such as racism, sexism, heterosexism/homophobia)" (Watt, 2007, p. 112). Stamina is the ability to identify, examine, and integrate one's dissonance when faced with conflict. When participants are prepared to have the stamina to stay in these difficult dialogues together, then groups can establish trusting, supportive, and sustained relationships that are crucial to "a long-term relationship with evolving solutions" (Watt et al., 2022, p. 24) to intractable social problems.

Ways of Being practices offer prompts that guide participants in navigating "how" to be in difficult dialogues. Personal ways of Being

Table 1. Summary of theory of Being practices and cross-cutting tools.

Personal Ways of Being	Relational Ways of Being	Community Ways of Being
• Focusing on you • Humanizing otherness in self • Recognizing defenses • Discerning motivations	• Listening deeply • Humanizing otherness in relationships and idea exploration • Exploring defenses • Dissenting wisely and well	• Third thing and third-thinging • Balancing dialogue and action • Normalizing defenses • Embracing trouble as a learning opportunity • Viewing missteps as developmental

Cross-Cutting Tools
Being Touchstones
Open and honest questions
Third-thinging
Privileged Identity Exploration (PIE) model

practices focus on raising self-awareness when experiencing cognitive and emotional discomfort. Relational ways of Being practices focus on sustaining authentic relationships with others, especially during conflict. Community ways of Being practices focus on facing conflict as a group in ways that shift toward community thriving. The theory of Being is also comprised of cross-cutting tools that support deeper exploration of each of these Being practices. Table 1 lists these key components of the theory (see Watt et al., 2022, for a more detailed explanation of all Being practices and tools). The steering committee used the ways of Being practices and tools to structure ARC.

ARC Design

ARC has operated in the College of Education since fall 2020 to inspire and normalize conversations that deconstruct how racism operates in our community (Watt et al., 2021). A critical element of ARC, and a process-oriented approach, is creating multiple opportunities for individuals, small groups, larger groups, and the college-wide community to engage in conversations that "critically examine how racism operates within the College" (Watt et al., 2021, p. 131) and to plan action in job-relevant ways. Ways of Being practices are dynamic and can shift

based on the contexts and relationships in which people find themselves, thus offering multiple ways to engage with the ideas that are important to promoting and strengthening ways of Being practices. To that end, the ARC structure included various offerings to invite individuals in the organization into the process (i.e., open forums, skill-building sessions, affinity groups, and Being Circles; see Table 2 for an overview and description). To illustrate specific applications of the theory of Being in ARC, we next describe practices and tools used in the open forums.

Table 2. Overview and Description of ARC structures

Name	Description
ARC Open Forums	Monthly college-wide meetings. These are opportunities to be in community, reflect, and act together on policies and practices that are intentionally anti-racist. (Offered Years 1–3.)
ARC Skill-Building Sessions	Monthly community discussions that focus on skill development around anti-racism with invited speaker. (Offered Years 1 and 2 only.)
ARC Administrative Council	A structure for the college's existing departments, centers, and committees to gather and to strategize on how to incorporate anti-racist strategies into day-to-day practices. The work of the ARC happens through centers, collegiate standing committees, departments, student organizations, and administration. This leadership group includes a representative from each unit. Members of this group communicate strategies being implemented in their units, share resources, and discuss success and barriers to implementation of anti-racist practices in the College of Education. The ARC administrative council representatives will lead relevant conversations with their constituents, seeking input, and devising strategy that will increase the capacity of the college to practice as an anti-racist organization. (In operation Years 1–3.)
Affinity Groups	Formalized gathering spaces for people who share a common identity. The groups may serve different purposes for different groups. These groups intend to be a supportive and protected space for groups to discuss issues and experiences. (Offered Year 3 only.)
Being Circles	A space for individuals within the organization for support to reflect on their role as well as their active participation in the college's change effort. Being Circles are small group cohorts that open up space and opportunities for reflection and exploration of personal attitudes and behaviors that sustain racism. After a positive experience

Name	Description
	in small cohort groups, participants find increased stamina to stay in difficult dialogues regarding anti-racism organizational change efforts. The next step after personal reflection is to reflect on the ways in which racism has been enacted in the institution. The process not only focuses on what people and organizations "do" but also involves reflection and action on "how" individuals and organizations maintain systems of exclusion and oppression. (Offered Years 1 and 3.)

Source: College of Education. (n.d.). Anti-Racism Collaborative. Retrieved August 12, 2023, from https://education.uiowa.edu/about/anti-racism-initiatives/anti-racism-collaborative#how-does-arc-function

ARC Open Forums

The ARC steering committee coordinated bi-weekly, college-wide meetings where everyone in the college (administrators, faculty, staff, students) was invited to engage in discussion around a specific topic selected by participants. Example topics include the recruitment and retention of people of color in the college, presidential executive orders around immigration, and state legislative policies around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Regardless of topic, open forums were structured similarly to encourage participants to practice personal, relational, and community ways of being during the session (foundational skills related to the ways of being were taught during ARC skill-building sessions). Open forums began with Being Touchstones (tool)—a set of parameters to invite individuals to be intentional around how they come together into a community to have difficult dialogues (see Table 3).

Participants would read through the Touchstones and choose one to focus on for the session. The purpose of this activity was to create a "sacred space" (Watt et al., 2022, p. 11) for interrogating and acting on the controversial topics the group brought into the ARC. By calling attention to these practices as we entered the space, the participants were reminded to regularly attend to the thoughts and feelings that arise throughout the session. Next, third-thinging (tool) was introduced to orient participants on how to think with each other about the chosen

Table 3. Being Touchstones

Being Touchstones:
- Adopted from the touchstones originally developed by the Center for Courage & Renewal.
- Highlight a group dialogue and provide principles to create a safe place where the members can share ideas while being their authentic self in a genuine relationship with others.

Examples of Being Touchstones:
- **Practicing being present**: Be here. Be present as fully as you are able. Be here with your doubts, fears, and failings as well as your convictions, joys, and successes.
- **Practicing living the questions**: Let go of right answers. When it's hard, turn to wonder. If you feel judgmental or defensive, ask yourself, "What brought her/him/them to this belief? What feelings are arising for him/her/them?" And perhaps the most important question: "What does my reaction teach me about myself?"
- **Practicing hope**: Believe that it's possible to emerge from this work with what you need, what the community needs, and with more energy, openness, and perspective so that our community can hold greater capacity for transformation, healing, and wholeness.

topic (see Figure 1). A third thing (as a noun) is often an artifact like a reading, poem, or song lyrics that gives the participants a chance to situate themselves around a common focal point (i.e., third-thinging as a verb, community-ways-of-being practice). While sharing their reflections, participants can learn that people make meaning of the artifact in a variety of ways and that there is no single right way to have a relationship with the third thing. Third-thinging offers a practice that participants can continue to apply when engaging with a more complex third things like racism, which is what participants explored in both breakout groups and as the whole group. By placing the third thing at the center of the conversation, individuals have an opportunity to explore the community relationship to the issue so the community, not single individuals, can be accountable in addressing it. Moreover, third-thinging shifts the group dynamics from us-vs.-them positioning to us-and-them exploration, therefore mitigating adversarial mentality and sharing the burden of creating solutions so that it will not be on marginalized communities alone anymore (Watt et al., 2022). Together, the practices and tools nurture a process that individuals and groups can use to build the stamina to stay with difficult dialogues across situations (e.g., teaching, departmental meetings, affinity groups, Being Circles).

Third thing:
- A third thing allows a person or the first thing and the second person or second thing to share their experiences about the third thing.
- One person (the first thing) and another person (the second thing) can center on the idea or the issue (the third thing) in exploring contradictory ideas around the issue.
- When a community engages in third-thinging (a verb form of a third thing) about a conflict, it is centering a complex social problem such as racism, genderism, sexism, heterosexism as a focal point for dialogue.
- Viewing conflicts as a third thing creates a space where a community can see this problem as a transcendent idea. They can view it including and beyond any particular positionality.
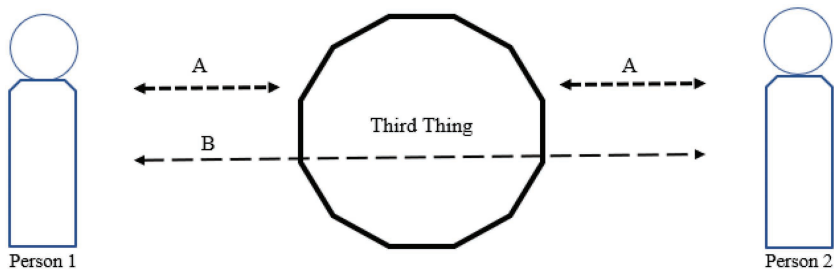
A. Interaction between the individual and the third thing allows one to understand their own experiences and socialization.
B. Seeing another person's reaction to the third thing allows for the humanization of the other, and the realization that others may experience the world in different ways.

Figure 1. Visual conception of third thing. Note: The description and the visual image are from Weaver & Mollet (2022) in Watt et al. (2022).

Evaluating ARC's Process-Oriented Approach: Data Source, Participants, and Analysis

The purpose of this paper was to describe the impact of ARC and what we learned from implementing this process-oriented approach. To achieve this goal, we analyzed data from three main sources: formative evaluations, summative evaluations, and discussion notes. In year two of ARC (fall 2021 to spring 2022), we conducted evaluations to understand how participants stay with the ARC conversations and whether this process-oriented approach in

the context of anti-racism results in changes. While the planning team is still evolving our understanding of how to measure the process and what the outcome of anti-racism efforts is when using the process orientation, we used formative and summative evaluations to assess the "outcome" of the process-oriented approach and ARC. The discussion notes were taken during each session of ARC when there was a small or large group discussion; one member in each small group took notes of what was discussed and/or everyone in a large group discussion was invited to leave their thoughts on discussion questions on a shared online document (i.e., Google Drive document, Jamboard).

First, formative evaluations were conducted after each ARC session to understand participants' experiences with a process-oriented approach. All participants of each session (approximately 15–30 attended each session) were invited to complete an online survey, and the completion of the survey was completely voluntary. In total, we conducted nine evaluations (October 2021 to April 2022) that included responses from 92 participants. Among the participants who completed the evaluations, the majority was White (76%), cisgender woman (69%), and staff (54%). Second, summative evaluations were conducted toward the end of year two to explore how participants perceived the changes that ARC brought to them. We invited all participants of the ARC to participate either in an online survey with open-ended questions or an online interview depending on their preference of how to answer the questions. Fourteen people participated in an online survey and one person participated in an online interview. The majority of survey respondents was White (53%), cisgender woman (60%), and staff (40%). Finally, we analyzed discussion notes from years one and two of ARC. A total of 17 group conversation documents were analyzed.

The closed-ended responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, frequency) and the open-ended responses and discussion notes were analyzed using content analysis.

Findings

Measuring Stamina

In the formative evaluations, we asked the participants about their level of comfort with process orientation, engagement level, and best/worst words that describe their emotions during the conversations. In this evaluation, our focus was on "how" the participants stayed in the conversation (i.e., stamina) instead of asking whether they mastered the Being skills taught.

The results showed that participants generally reported a high comfort level with the process-oriented approach (4.34 out of 5) and a high level of staying present with dialogues (8.32 out of 10) across the different types of conversations instituted into the structure of the organization. We also asked the participants to choose the best/worst words that described the emotions that arose during each session of the ARC. The top 10 best words that were picked up were "appreciative, engaged, focused, supportive, inspired, unsure, tired, comfortable, optimistic, confused," and the top 10 worst words were "rejected, judged, angry, hurt, oppressed, annoyed, embarrassed, confident, relaxed, comfortable." These numbers and words show that the participants generally hold positive and authentic perspectives of the process-oriented approach of ARC conversations while showing some confusion and uncertainty.

Engaging Individuals in Anti-Racism Work

In the summative evaluation, we asked via a survey and interview directly about participants' perceptions of the changes that ARC has brought. From the content analysis of the responses, we found that ARC influenced individual-level changes in three ways. First, ARC changed the ways of being with anti-racism discussions: Participants were able to build skills and raise awareness regarding anti-racism

efforts, gained more confidence in engaging with dialogues around racism, and became appreciative of different perspectives. Second, participants started to center racism in their job-relevant daily lives. Third, participants were motivated about ongoing efforts to apply learnings from the ARC into their daily lives. The example quotes from these themes are in Table 4.

Table 4. Individual level changes.

Theme	Description	Example Quote
Ways of being with anti-racism discussions	Participants were able to build skills, gain knowledge, and raise awareness regarding anti-racism efforts. Participants gained more confidence or comfort in engaging with difficult dialogues around racism. Participants became appreciative of different perspectives of others.	"I've been able to better consider the nuances of many issues that I had previously been approaching as black and white. I'm still learning how to embrace grey areas, but ARC discussions and touchstones have been instrumental in that growth. . . . As a white individual, I know that I have a lifetime of unlearning to do, and ARC has been very influential in that journey for me." "I am generally more mindful of privilege and structural racism, and I do not shy away from discussing the potential impact of power in various relationships. I think this has been particularly helpful in developing my relationships with BIPOC students on campus as I am a safe person with whom to disclose race-related challenges occurring on campus." "I am working harder to seek out the perspectives of those who hold different beliefs."

Theme	Description	Example Quote
Centering racism	Participants started to center racism in their job-relevant daily lives.	"I think I more readily bring up race and issues of racism in conversations."
Efforts to apply learnings from the ARC into daily lives	Participants said they will continue to apply the learning from ARC in their daily lives.	"I am striving to be a better ally and activist and am willing to push a little harder on challenging policies or actions that I perceive as sexist, racist, etcetera."

Emerging Insights and Questions

The analysis of discussion notes revealed individual-level changes and changes to how the ARC planning team framed discussion questions so people (team and participants) became more engaged with the process-oriented approach. We also identified challenges that the participants encountered during ARC sessions from the two evaluations and discussion notes. This section will provide examples of the evolving nature of ARC discussions and the limitations of this process-oriented approach with our efforts to address those challenges.

Change of Discussion Questions

Content analysis of the two years of discussion notes that contain four semesters of ARC showed an important change in how to frame discussion questions: it evolved in a way that invited the participants to discuss racism more explicitly and to more authentically participate in the discussion.

In the first semester of ARC, the discussion questions were rather broad and rarely invited participants to name the racism in the college community. For example, in the first semester, one of the questions was, "When we face another external assault again like the Executive Order, what role will you play (as individuals, faculty, staff, and students) to productively face down the attack?" In the second semester, the questions invited more personal reflections about their own

relationship with the issue, such as, "What are the ways racial injustice or inequity linger that I can notice or experience?" These questions also limited participants' focus on how they could "be with" racism issues and instead asked about actions that they could take.

Then, in the third and fourth semesters, we started to group people by how they entered into conversations around racism such as, "What is your deepest desire surrounding racism—to end it, to fix it, to understand it, to stop the pain, to protect, to punish?" Also, the discussion questions asked more directly to name the racism in the college by asking questions that allow the participants to name the racism (e.g., "Where do I [we] see structural racism show up in my job-related tasks in the college?"), align themselves with the issue (e.g., "What feeling, thought, or action arises as I reflect on the structural racism I see in my role or in the college?"), and to think of practices that they can do in job-relevant ways (e.g., "How might I, in some way, align my thoughts and feelings and then act in the realm of my job-related tasks to disrupt racist practices?"). This change of questions encouraged the participants to practice third-thinging, which helped people to put racism at the center of the conversation as well as asked each member to reflect on how they relate to racism.

Efforts to Address Challenges

Some areas of improvement were identified from the two evaluations and the discussion notes: (1) requesting for visible action; and (2) a lack of diversity of participants. During year three of ARC, the ARC planning team developed alternative ways to deal with the challenges, which are described below.

As the process-oriented approach puts a priority on personal reflection and on establishing trust among people, it often involves ongoing conversations among participants. This nature of process orientation requires time for organizational-level change to happen. In the evaluations as well as during the group conversations, ARC participants often expressed frustration with a lack of instantly visible changes they could observe in the college (e.g., ". . . frustration that ARC is not moving

fast enough."). The participants often asked for concrete action and showed discomfort with continuing conversations (e. g., ". . . tired of talking about it.") while some of the participants acknowledged that anti-racism work requires time, and the discussions should be ongoing.

In an effort to respond to this challenge, in year three of ARC, we chose to provide a basics of Being workshop where the participants had an opportunity to deepen their understanding of a process-oriented approach and improve their ability to apply ways of Being practices to their daily lives. Also, we decided to focus on one of the racialized practices within the college and discuss the specific topic throughout the whole semester instead of discussing different questions in each ARC session. This way, participants could practice discussions with one specific third thing and the leadership group could give feedback on what was discussed by taking an action to deal differently with the practice.

Secondly, although the ARC is open to all members of the College of Education, very few students participated in the sessions, and the majority of participants were White. From the evaluations and discussion notes, participants often pointed to the lack of diversity in those who participated in ARC conversations. In response to these issues, in year three, ARC implemented Affinity Groups, which provide formalized gathering spaces for people who share a common identity.

Steering Committee Reflections

The ARC steering committee have been continuously amazed at the sustained participation from a group of faculty, students, and staff, specifically when such participation has been merely invitational and not rewarded by the organization. Over the three years, the committee has learned that committed support for the work of ARC from leadership is necessary and has thus started to shift to institutionalize ARC within the college. While starting ARC by a select group of faculty, staff, students and alumni was helpful for structuring the process, the steering committee has learned that more democratic and representtative participation in the steering committee will be helpful for sustaining a generative and inclusive process.

Implications

Based on our successes and limitations, organizations seeking to apply a process-oriented work to anti-racism need to be prepared to create the environmental conditions that support long-term collective conversations. This includes dedicating time in the organizational calendar to have difficult dialogues and professional development for members at all levels of the organization that teach the skills needed to participate in difficult dialogues. Practitioners should also embed process orientation into their planning and build in opportunities for evaluation and revision to anti-racism initiatives, especially since we know that the mindset of fixing the structural problem has limitations. Finally, we suggest researchers keep evolving answers to questions such as, "What is the outcome of anti-racism work?" and, "How do we measure process?"

Bios

Nayoung Jang is a research professor in the Education Innovation Center at Korea University, Sejong. Before coming to KUS, she worked as a postdoctoral scholar at the University of Iowa after receiving her PhD in higher education and student affairs at the same university. Her research interests include psychosocial development of college students with an emphasis on spirituality, college student success, and the impact of college on students.

Sherry K. Watt, PhD, is a professor in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program at the University of Iowa. Sherry is a facilitator prepared by the Center for Courage & Renewal. She is the coeditor of *The Theory of Being: Practices for Transforming Self and Communities across Difference* (May 2022). Sherry coleads the College of Education's Antiracism Collaborative(ARC). Sherry and her team work together on research and practice that support "ways of being" in difficult dialogues that inspires thoughtful and humanizing action.

Duhita Mahatmya is an associate research scientist in the College of Education at the University of Iowa. As a research methodologist, she provides conceptual and analytical support to projects that examine equity issues in K–12 and higher education in the United States. Her own research utilizes a systems approach to examine family, school, and community factors that influence child and adolescent academic and social development.

Will Coghill-Behrends, PhD, is clinical associate professor of multilingual education at the University of Iowa's College of Education, where he codirects the Linda R. Baker Teacher Leader Center, specifically focusing on global education initiatives and student-to-teacher pathway programs in particular for historically underrepresented populations in the educator workforce. He also coleads the College of Education's Antiracism Collaborative, now in its fourth year. Will is a former high school world language teacher.

Milad Mohebali is an assistant professor of educational administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Milad's scholarship broadly involves social justice in education and decolonization. He is a coeditor of a book on difficult dialogues, *Theory of Being: Practices for Transforming Self and Society across Difference.*

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