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Articulating an Intersectional, Relational Framework to Propose Targeted Interventions for Anti-Racist Institutional Change at TechBoston Academy

Introduction:

TechBoston Academy was built in 1925 on stolen land. Our school's structure, like most public schools, was arranged intentionally to assimilate non-land-owning, non-English-speaking, non-white-men into American culture until they are able to perform according to capitalist standards of production. Our institution bears the results of this historical and sociopolitical location. We bear the results. Our students bear the results. Our American inheritance is the loss of our humanity. For the sake of our humanity, we must actively resist.

This paper is one small act of resistance in order to begin guiding our school to make more intentional shifts in pedagogy, practice, and culture in order to effect wider change. Without targeted interventions and active resistance, TechBoston will continue to do damage as we reinforce the culture of power on institutional, interpersonal, and internal levels. Producing change within our school requires shifting the behaviors and beliefs enacted by administration and policy, changing the practices and pedagogy of the teaching faculty, and adjusting students' experiences and opportunities. Transforming the institution in these ways should allow TechBoston to begin moving into an intersectional, anti-racist identity as an institution, with "a sense of restored community" and a commitment to a "future vision of an institution and wider community that has overcome systemic racism and all other forms of oppression" (Crossroads Ministry).

Systems of Oppression and TechBoston Academy:

An enormous body of research describes the devastating impacts of systemic racism and other forms of oppression and how these impact people living in America. The most well-known branch of this research in the educational field outlines the achievement gap, a term created to describe the disparity between the academic performance of young people of color and that of their white peers. In Boston Public Schools, the achievement gap presents in the disproportionate identification of white students as gifted or for entrance to exam schools, and lower graduation rates for students of color, especially male students of color (Marshall et al.). Further, students with disabilities and English language learners consistently perform at lower rates than their peers. Students of color (including girls and women) experience higher rates of discipline, suspension, and expulsion in Boston Public Schools (Crenshaw, Ocen, Nanda; GAO).

At TechBoston, an open enrollment pilot school, the student body is 98% students of color and 100% low-income (see Appendix A for a thorough overview of the demographics). Despite TechBoston's many positive qualities, male students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities perform lower on standardized tests, graduate at lower rates, and attend school less often than their peers (Boston Public Schools Office of Data and Accountability). Yet deeper investigation of this issue reveals that the pervasive nature of systemic racism is more far reaching, more painful, and more urgent than a gap in test scores or graduation rates. Addressing only the achievement gap limits the scope of the conversation and renders a solution to the issue impossible. The students at TechBoston are being impacted by much wider social factors that influence the way they experience school and the way school treats them. In order to understand how these factors impact students, it's useful to take a wider lens to understand how these systems are intersecting to disenfranchise our young people.

In Boston, racial identity is linked to a wide variety of inequities, including, but not limited to, educational outcomes. Documentation of these inequities have been synthesized in a 2017 report from the Boston Public Health Commision. The authors outline data showing that white families have an astronomically disproportionate household net worth compared to people of any other race; that children of color have higher rates of asthma and other health issues; and that adults of color visit the emergency room more often and die more frequently than their white peers of diabetes and other diseases. One of the most common metrics for looking at health inequities is the rates of infant mortality. In Boston, communities of color have significantly heightened rates of infant mortality compared to white communities. Even though race is a socially constructed system, racial identity in the United States has real consequences for a person's health and well-being. It is impossible to ignore these data when considering what is happening in schools, where a vulnerable population - young people - live out a significant percentage of their time.

> "Race is a specious classification of human beings, created by Europeans (whites), to assign human worth and social status using himself or white as the model for humanity and the height of human achievement, for the purpose of establishing and maintaining privilege and power.
> Racism = race prejudice + power."
>
> - People's Institute for Survival and Beyond

The disparities in Boston Public Schools reflect and exacerbate the wider circumstances of Boston and the United States. The combination of a variety of socially and institutionally oppressive structures intersect to continue to produce inequity for the benefit of those in power, harming our young people and limiting teachers' capacity to make change. bell hooks famously articulates the intersection of oppressive systems in America as the "white supremacist imperialist capitalist patriarchy" (1). Without actively working to undo those systems, TechBoston will continue to be culpable in maintaining the negative repercussions of the white supremacist imperialist capitalist patriarchy for both staff and students. To become an institution that does not work for the system requires us to take on an enormous personal and institutional effort to undo oppressive structures, unlearn oppressive thinking and beliefs, and to create new ways of thinking and being.

Achieving a Transformative Identity:

It would be a radical act for TechBoston Academy to achieve the transformative identity outlined by Crossroads Ministry (see Appendix B). The educational context, a site of forced relationship, has great potential for providing models to other types of institutions to do this work. If TechBoston can begin this process more intentionally, eventually our school community can act "in larger communities to eliminate all forms of oppression." Lucille Clifton says in "Let There Be New Flowering" that "love" should be "at the end." We cannot end with "love" until we go through the war of undoing the socially-borne and continuously constructed systems of oppression that damage our capacity to connect with others.

let there be new flowering
in the fields let the fields
turn mellow for the men
let the men keep tender
through the time let the
time
be wrested from the war
let the war be won
let love be
at the end

john a. powell's legal scholarship on targeted universalism offers a key entry point into finding the transformation point for our school. In order to address "structural racialization," powell argues that we should adopt a "targeted universal strategy," which is "inclusive of the needs of both the dominant and the marginal groups" but "pays particular attention to the situation of the marginal group" (802-803). A targeted universal approach to making change at TechBoston requires creating specific interventions for the people experiencing marginalization and inequity, while also remaining thoughtful about the needs and approaches for working with people in the dominant group.

It is critical to note that in order to make these interventions successful, it is necessary to remain aware about the ways that addressing structural racism requires deep interpersonal work. Janet Helms developed her frameworks of racial identity development in order to bring to light the ways that "systematic analysis of the racial dynamics between persons [can] provide information about when, where, and what type of intervention is necessary to create a more healthy racial climate" (195). This "systematic analysis" allows relational work to happen in a way that acknowledges the impacts of the system on an individual's psychological state and internal beliefs. Building on the work of both hooks and Helms, Cheryl Matias and Robin DiAngelo argue that we can find a "radical [possibility] of liberating our humanity from racism and White supremacy" by acknowledging the existence of the "abusive pattern" of systemic racism's impact on white people (18). Matias and DiAngelo focus on the idea of healing from the abuse as a therapeutic, interpersonal process, describing the "emotional battlescars" of repeated denial of systemic racism and White supremacy. They argue, in their conclusion, that the implications of this "racial cray-cray" is especially important for education in the U.S., where "there are a majority of White teachers in urban classrooms, perpetrating cray-cray on students of Color" (17). In the classroom, Helm's systematic analysis of racial dynamics brings to light a number of ways that students and teachers are acting out their (often underdeveloped) racial identities in ways that reproduce the damaging impacts of the white supremacist imperialist capitalist patriarchy.

> "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."
> - Lilla Watson

Imagining Alternatives:

We know that TechBoston has to address the pervasive and insidious nature of the white supremacist imperialist capitalist patriarchy in our everyday interactions, practices, and pedagogical aims. We are being impacted on a constant basis by the structure our school is embedded in. We are reproducing marginalization for our gender non-conforming and LGBTQ+

students, for our neuroatypical, disabled or differently-abled students, for our students from other countries or speakers of other languages, for our feminine of center students. We are reproducing internalized superiority and privilege for our (few) white students, for our masculine of center students, for our able-bodied and neurotypical students, for our English speaking students. We are failing these students, and through that failure, we are failing ourselves.

A teacher said to us: "Now do you see why they say you can't go anywhere?" (#EmbraceTheStruggl

I had a white teacher and I was kind of slow then because I was kind of slow because I was still learning English. My first languages were French/Creole. One time we were learning how to say something correctly. For some reason, I couldn't get it right, so she told me "Of course, you're never going to get it right"

As teachers and administrators, it should be our aim to help our students find success. We should be counteracting the inequity that surrounds our school, our students' lives, and our lives. We must take explicit steps to counteract both systemic, institutional, interpersonal, and internal effects of oppression, actively moving towards becoming more anti-racist both as ourselves and as a community. Change in an institution must be scaled and interwoven between factions of constituents at that institution. At our school, the three primary groups of people impacted on a daily basis directly by what's happening are the students, faculty, and administration. It is important to acknowledge the young people are placed at a compounded disadvantage in terms of power relationships. This analysis must be included in our targeted interventions to address the impacts of structural racism at each of these layers as we aim to transform our institution.

"Last year I had a teacher who refused to use my [chosen] name and kept using she/her pronouns." (#EmbraceTheStruggle).

Proposed Interventions for 2019-2020 School Year:

The proposed interventions that follow are intended to be the opening steps for a long-term, intensive process to transform TechBoston as an institution. This intense interpersonal work requires significant investment of resources and a certain amount of discomfort on the individual and institutional scale. At any point, with enough resistance, the institution can, and will, slip back into being more harmful than helpful, more oppressive than radical, more racist than anti-racist. Yet we know that we must take the first step towards transformation, because what is at stake is too precious to lose. These interventions are described using three scales: student, teacher, and administrative/policy. As this work continues, new layers can be added to this process, including community members, families, and other district stakeholders.

Young people at TechBoston continuously articulate their desire to shift the school's culture and policies. Next year, we propose an Intersectionality Humanities course for 28 10-12th grade students. In this course students will collaboratively investigate systems of oppression and how these are reinforced or reproduced by Boston Public Schools and TechBoston's policies and practices. Following on the work of the #EmbraceTheStruggle student group, students in this course will research and rewrite policy or intervene for better institutional practices. Students will be supported to have institutional power and make real change, both for themselves, their peers, and for the adults they interact with. Further, the #EmbraceTheStruggle 10-12th student group will continue regular meetings with financial and logistical administrative support. The group works to identify issues of inequity impacting the student body and create interventions. To date, this has included creating professional development on microaggressions for staff, increasing the course selection options for students, and rewriting the school dress code. In future school years, both of these initiatives will hopefully be expanded to include more students (including in other grades), as well as to be codified into institutional systems so as to remain intact regardless of faculty or administrative support.

The teaching faculty at TechBoston, which includes a large portion of veteran, master teachers, must come together as a group to intentionally shift our teaching frameworks. This spring and summer, a small group of teachers with prior background in racial identity and anti-racist work will write and implement professional development during the coming school year for the entire teaching faculty. This will follow the model of “critical professional development” described by Rita Kohli et al. as “reframe[ing] the possibilities of teacher professional development through [a] model of critical, dialogical practice,” positioning teachers as “experts in their own social justice-oriented professional growth” (7). Critical professional development will be implemented with the faculty during the course of an entire school year, with supportive mentoring circles as well as all-staff learning about systemic racism and ways it impacts our lives, practices, and pedagogical choices. This professional development will move away from simplistic curricular analysis into doing relational, emotional work to unlearn racism and White supremacy.

Most important to the implementation of this work is administrative and policy-level support. In the spring of 2019, administrators will attend at least one, but ideally two, anti-racist trainings, one on health inequities in Boston and one on the structure of racism and how to undo it. Administrators will also participate in the teacher-led critical professional development in the 2019-2020 school year, as well as acting as the key contacts for pushback or resistance during anti-racism professional development. Finally, administration will be responsible, as the key policy gateholders and go-betweens for the district, for listening more carefully to the implications of policy decisions, responding to the needs of students and teachers as these are presented.

Through these steps, we hope to begin making change at our institution. TechBoston's vision, recently rewritten by faculty, is: "We RISE Together," with the core values, Respect, Integrity, Success, and Excellence of our school reflected in the word RISE. We have already identified the nature of our collective effort and our power as a community. Without actively working to undo the continuous damage done by the white supremacist imperialist capitalist patriarchy, we will never be able to truly rise. The question that remains, however, is whether or not our community can commit to the painful and revolutionary process of change that this transformation requires.

Appendix A - Notes on TechBoston Academy's Demographics and Structure

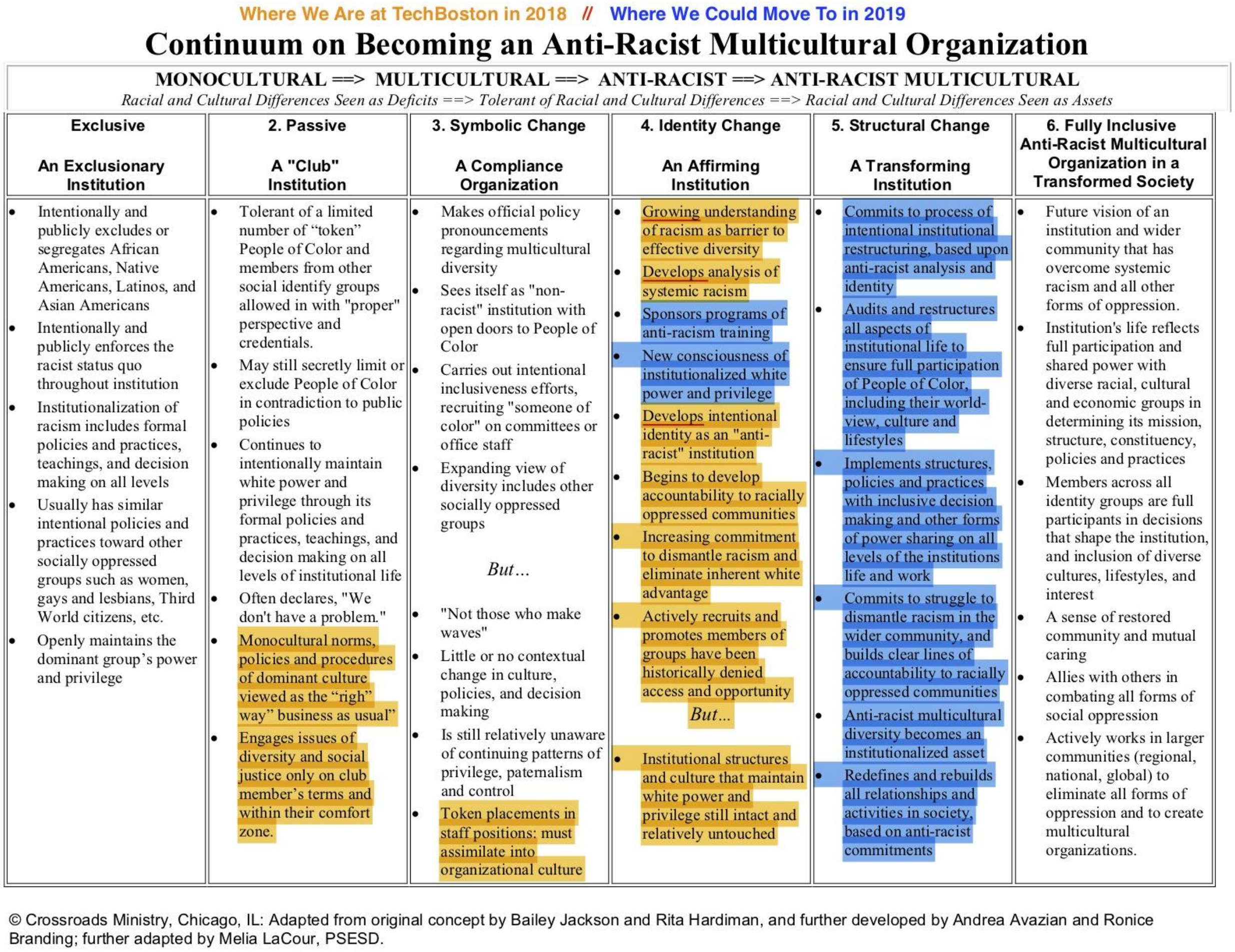
TechBoston Academy is a large 6-12th grade pilot public school in Dorchester, MA. Of the 1300 students, 98% are young people of color, and 100% of students receive free or price reduced lunch. Approximately 98% of students graduate in the senior class each year. Of the approximately 120 members of the teaching faculty, about 60% are white and 40% are people of color, a significantly more diverse staff than the average Boston Public School.

TechBoston Academy houses three self-contained programs with specific populations of students: a L/AB cluster (Crossroads) for students with explosive emotional impairments and learning disabilities; a PATH program for students with implosive (anxiety, depression) emotional impairments; and a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) program for students who have recently emigrated from Haiti and do not speak English. As such, TechBoston has a higher percentage of English Language Learners and students with disabilities than many Massachusetts (or Boston) public schools.

As a result of the large size and wide grade span, TechBoston operates in three academies. The 6-8th grades (Respect) are housed in a connected space called the annex. The 9th grade (Integrity) is piloting a new program in collaboration with MIT called STEAM Studios, and the 10-12th grades (Success and Excellence) are housed on the 2nd and 3rd floors of the building. The academies operate on different schedules and rarely intersect except in all-staff meetings and two all-school events per year.

As a pilot school, TechBoston focused on integrating technology into every classroom, and is a one-to-one device school. The school day is extended beyond the regular Boston Public School requirements and teachers have autonomy over their own curriculum. Yet as a public school, TechBoston is still mandated to follow district and state testing requirements and other metrics, including teacher evaluation systems.

Appendix B:
The Crossroads Ministry Continuum



Where We Are at TechBoston in 2018 // Where We Could Move To in 2019

Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization

MONOCULTURAL ==> MULTICULTURAL ==> ANTI-RACIST ==> ANTI-RACIST MULTICULTURAL

Racial and Cultural Differences Seen as Deficits ==> Tolerant of Racial and Cultural Differences ==> Racial and Cultural Differences Seen as Assets

Exclusive An Exclusionary Institution	2. Passive A "Club" Institution	3. Symbolic Change A Compliance Organization	4. Identity Change An Affirming Institution	5. Structural Change A Transforming Institution	6. Fully Inclusive Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization in a Transformed Society
• Intentionally and publicly excludes or segregates African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans • Intentionally and publicly enforces the racist status quo throughout institution • Institutionalization of racism includes formal policies and practices, teachings, and decision making on all levels • Usually has similar intentional policies and practices toward other socially oppressed groups such as women, gays and lesbians, Third World citizens, etc. • Openly maintains the dominant group's power and privilege	• Tolerant of a limited number of "token" People of Color and members from other social identify groups allowed in with "proper" perspective and credentials. • May still secretly limit or exclude People of Color in contradiction to public policies • Continues to intentionally maintain white power and privilege through its formal policies and practices, teachings, and decision making on all levels of institutional life • Often declares, "We don't have a problem." • Monocultural norms, policies and procedures of dominant culture viewed as the "righ" way" business as usual" • Engages issues of diversity and social justice only on club member's terms and within their comfort zone.	• Makes official policy pronouncements regarding multicultural diversity • Sees itself as "non-racist" institution with open doors to People of Color • Carries out intentional inclusiveness efforts, recruiting "someone of color" on committees or office staff • Expanding view of diversity includes other socially oppressed groups *But…* • "Not those who make waves" • Little or no contextual change in culture, policies, and decision making • Is still relatively unaware of continuing patterns of privilege, paternalism and control • Token placements in staff positions: must assimilate into organizational culture	• Growing understanding of racism as barrier to effective diversity • Develops analysis of systemic racism • Sponsors programs of anti-racism training • New consciousness of institutionalized white power and privilege • Develops intentional identity as an "anti-racist" institution • Begins to develop accountability to racially oppressed communities • Increasing commitment to dismantle racism and eliminate inherent white advantage • Actively recruits and promotes members of groups have been historically denied access and opportunity *But…* • Institutional structures and culture that maintain white power and privilege still intact and relatively untouched	• Commits to process of intentional institutional restructuring, based upon anti-racist analysis and identity • Audits and restructures all aspects of institutional life to ensure full participation of People of Color, including their world-view, culture and lifestyles • Implements structures, policies and practices with inclusive decision making and other forms of power sharing on all levels of the institutions life and work • Commits to struggle to dismantle racism in the wider community, and builds clear lines of accountability to racially oppressed communities • Anti-racist multicultural diversity becomes an institutionalized asset • Redefines and rebuilds all relationships and activities in society, based on anti-racist commitments	• Future vision of an institution and wider community that has overcome systemic racism and all other forms of oppression. • Institution's life reflects full participation and shared power with diverse racial, cultural and economic groups in determining its mission, structure, constituency, policies and practices • Members across all identity groups are full participants in decisions that shape the institution, and inclusion of diverse cultures, lifestyles, and interest • A sense of restored community and mutual caring • Allies with others in combating all forms of social oppression • Actively works in larger communities (regional, national, global) to eliminate all forms of oppression and to create multicultural organizations.

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Appendix C:

Often, in conversations about race, systemic racism, and white supremacy, white people express confusion or other emotions implying cognitive dissonance around how the system of white supremacy impacts them. In other words, white people fail to understand what exactly is at stake if they don't dismantle this system. The system benefits them, so like other privileged groups (men, heterosexual people, able-bodied people), white people would prefer to remain ignorant to the ways the system is actually failing them. The perceived benefits of white supremacy, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged, result in a collective and individual loss of humanity for white people.

When a person or group of people is allowed to feel valuable and worthy based on a societally constructed system of oppression, we are actually taking away each person's humanity. White supremacy takes away each white person's individual value, culture, connection to place and people by reinforcing that a person is valuable simply because of a false construction of whiteness. White people in what is currently known as the United States are suffering a great loss in their participation in white supremacy. We are being cut off from our history, we are being cut off from ourselves. In moving towards anti-racist change, white people must find new modes of being and seeing.

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