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The discourse of denial: how white teacher candidates construct race, racism and 'white privilege'

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This qualitative study focuses on a representative sample from 200 teacher candidates' responses to Peggy McIntosh's article, 'White privilege: unpacking the invisible knapsack'. The notion and understanding of whiteness and white privilege were explored revealing several strategies that teacher candidates employed to avoid addressing whiteness and its attendant privileges in Canadian society. We analyse three primary strategies that the teacher candidates employed: ideological incongruence, liberalist notions of individualism and meritocracy, and the negation of white capital. Some implications of this study are that teacher education must help candidates understand their own racial identity formation and provide the learning space to work with the range of emotions and feelings of indignation that evolve from an exposure to white privilege and the 'myth of meritocracy'.

Introduction

Contemporary studies of race and education seek to move away from the quintessential focus on the 'racial other' and examine instead the institutionalization of whiteness and the systemic factors that underscore its continued dominance. Whiteness was often constructed in academic life, the media, politics and every day life of multiracial institutions as neutral and invisible.[1] The ongoing construction of white racial identities has socialized whites to conceptualize their world in ways that favor their positions within it. More importantly, those in positions of power and authority—for example, educators—construct discourses that are often academically and emotionally debilitating to the 'racial other'. Such construction and related action is informed by a white, race-privileged position.

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In this paper we explore the attitudes, beliefs and ideologies of a group of white pre-service teachers who are poised to reproduce and transmit the 'racial order' to the next generation of Canadians. These perspectives will be examined within the context of a Canadian national culture that strives for equity, racial diversity and social justice. As teacher educators, our work is informed by the importance of deconstructing whiteness in the academy and society in general. In making whiteness, and more so, white privilege, visible, we hope to interrogate and change the construction of whiteness as an unmarked narrative, invisible category, and white privilege as unearned and unmeritocratic. Therefore, this paper should not be regarded as an attempt to recenter whiteness; rather it is a move to ensure that whiteness is tabled as a viable subject for examination. The failure to examine notions of whiteness facilitates the maintenance of its incorporeal nature thereby reinscribing its dominating power. Or perhaps we could describe our exploration as a strategic focus on whiteness with the aim to challenge and unsettle it, rather than the tendency to use the centering of whiteness as a strategy of denial or protection. We therefore present the findings of our study within the theoretical framework of teacher preparation for social justice, examine the notions of whiteness and discuss its implications for working with white teachers in racialized school environments and a morally just society.

The two primary theoretical frameworks that foreground this study are critical-democratic education, and the notion of whiteness. Portelli and Solomon (2001) identify several elements that are regarded as central aspects that underscore critical-democratic education. These include critical thought, tolerance, agency, dialogue and respecting the importance of difference. The authors believe that education for democracy should be equitable, socially just, and prepare society's citizens to become active participants in the human community. Therefore, teachers in their role as educators play an integral part in preparing students for their role as citizens. As such, teachers' conceptions of democracy as it relates to notions of citizenship (which are intricately linked to discourses of race, racialization and belongingness), need to be examined.

Theorizing teacher education and white privilege

The study of whiteness examines the ways in which whiteness and white privilege have become institutionalized and identifies the systemic factors that underscore its continued dominance (Giroux, 1992; Giroux & McLaren, 1994; Rodriguez, 2000; Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000; Levine-Rasky, 2000a; Leonardo, 2002). Theorizing white privilege has emerged as a significant field of study within academia in recent years and provides another vantage point from which notions of race can be explored. Notions of whiteness emerged from the earlier writings of W. E. B. Dubois, Frederick Douglas and other African-American writers of their genre. Its contemporary resurgence has been heralded by authors such as Richard Dyer (1988) and Ruth Frankenberg (1993). According to Rodriguez (2000), white studies have served to challenge the marking of whiteness as invisible, colorless and as the inevitable norm. The author states:

> The focus, then, of examining the historical and social construction of whiteness, as well as the attendant effects of that construction process, is one of the major projects currently shaping the emerging texts on whiteness. (p. 1)

With regard to the field of teacher education, the study of whiteness seeks to have teachers and teacher candidates examine their overall understanding of their racial identity; the ideologies with which they enter the classroom; explore the impact of those ideologies on their teaching practices and their interactions with students (Tatum, 1992; Sleeter, 1993; Roman, 1993). Additionally, it seeks to interrogate the connection between race, power and education and also edifies the links to oppression. According to Levine-Rasky (2000b):

> … the turn to whiteness in teacher education reflects a problematization of whiteness as an active participant in systems of domination rather than of racialized differences as effect of domination. (p. 264)

There are several primary theoretical issues and concerns that are highlighted in discussions regarding the education of teachers in relation to the notion of whiteness. The increased racial diversity within Canadian schools and society in general is seldom reflected amongst teacher education candidates enrolled in faculties of education. The continued over-representation of white, female, middle class and heterosexual bodies within faculties clearly belies the increased minority representation in the schools. Although there has been an increase in the number of visible minority teacher candidates, the demographics of the program have remained relatively static over the years (Bascia, 1996). Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to have teacher candidates explore their personal attitudes and understandings of the ways in which their racial ascription and social positioning inform their actual practices and interactions with students.

Second, as Ontario, Canada, has feverishly returned to its conservative educational moorings, notions of equity, diversity and anti-racism practices have been largely marginalized as important sites for consideration within educational spheres. This retrogressive trend has resulted in the elimination of programs designed to provide minoritized students with the additional support and resources to enable them to compete effectively within the educational and employment markets.

Additionally, the move towards the standardization of the student curriculum and pedagogy along with the testing of teachers to ensure that they develop the requisite skills for preparing students for the globalized job market has fostered the continued decimation of diversity and equity principles and practices within schools and faculties of education. This process of program and service reduction at the institutional level, removes the necessity of reflective thought and critical interrogation of the curriculum in faculties of education, focusing instead on the technological and skills-oriented approaches to teacher preparation. A further result of this approach is the continued investment in liberalist ideologies regarding schooling and social mobility that is often evidenced amongst teacher candidates (Sleeter, 1992; Henry & Tator, 1994).

These practices have served to ensure the continued and ever-widening educational disparity between dominant and minoritized social groups. This widening gap

amongst the social groups ensures the continued alienation of minority groups in schooling, the dismantling of equity and anti-racism initiatives (Dei & Karumanchery, 2001), and the continued invisibility of white privilege as the dominant society continues to cling to notions of meritocracy (Bourdieu, 1977; Henry & Tator, 1994). It is this invisibility that we seek to challenge by ensuring that teacher candidates are enabled to interrogate their personal investment in either challenging or maintaining the existing systems of dominance evidenced in schooling.

The continued investment in liberalism amongst teachers and teacher candidates, and of them entering the classrooms apart and separate from their ideological moorings and historical underpinnings, serves to reinforce technologies of marginalization and exclusion. Their continued exhortations that 'I just see people' (Berry, 1995) serves to reinforce the theorized invisibility of race and racism, thereby limiting one's ability to interrogate notions of privilege and its corollary, the deprivileging of minoritized social groups. Further to this there is the possibility that some whites may resist identifying color for fear of being discriminatory thereby violating educational and humanitarian principles of equity (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Schofield, 1997). This failure to name color is clearly indicative of the negative associations that continue to be attached to notions of color and race.

We hope that the findings of this study will help teacher candidates understand their own racial identity formation and its potential impact on teaching in multiracial classrooms. In addition, this study will help teachers develop the pedagogical insights needed to work for equity, racial diversity and social justice in Canadian society.

Research setting and methodology

This qualitative study focuses on a representative sample from 200 teacher candidates of which 60 are students of colour (African-heritage, Latino, South-Asian, Southeast-Asian and First-Nations) mixed by gender and social class backgrounds. The remaining 140 white students were mainly of European descent with some of Jewish background. The participants in this study were enrolled in a nine-month, post-baccalaureate teacher education program at two urban universities in Ontario, Canada. The participants from one university were racially and ethnically diverse and were enrolled in an education program which was specifically designed to provide teacher candidates with a strong base for understanding equity issues and increase their skill level for working with diverse student populations in an urban context.

Specific objectives of such a program are to: (1) provide an environment in which teacher candidates of various racial and ethno-cultural groups and abilities have extended opportunities to develop teaching competencies and professional relationships in a collaborative environment; (2) integrate issues of equity and diversity into the curriculum and pedagogy of the teacher education program and in the classrooms of practicum schools; (3) prepare teacher candidates to work in urban environments where the diversity that represents the current Canadian reality is evidenced; and (4)

develop collaboration among practicum school staff, the university's teacher candidates and teacher educators forming a community of learners.

The participants from the second university were predominantly white and were enrolled in a regular mainstream program where the aforementioned goals and objectives were not clearly identified as central to the operation of the program. All participants are enrolled in either a primary/junior, junior/intermediate or intermediate/senior program.

The Peggy McIntosh (1990) article 'White privilege: unpacking the invisible knapsack' was a required reading for a Social Foundations of Education course taken by all the participants. As part of their weekly responses to the readings, the teacher candidates were required to provide a one-page response based on a quote they perceived to be central in their reading of the article and to outline their understanding and reactions to that specific quote or theme. In this assignment they were expected to discuss the manner in which the quote relates to their prior knowledge, experience, beliefs and to other readings. This assignment is given to students at the midpoint of the course after they had been exposed to some discussions regarding issues of difference and varying sites of oppressions. They are also required to perform a similar reflective analysis of other readings as part of the course requirements.

This Peggy McIntosh article focuses on multiple ways in which white privilege is experienced and rendered invisible to white people. It provides a list of 26 taken-for-granted privileges and practices and points to ways in which race does not negatively impact on the daily practices of whites as it does for people of color in North American society. Some of these privileges that whites have include:

- Positive representation in school curriculum materials, media, contribution to civilization, positions of authority.
- Representation and availability of 'white' related goods and services.
- Freedom of association, residential choice, and the granting of insider status in organizations.
- Unquestioned acceptance of financial reliability and employment credibility.
- Freedom from the burden of representing the 'white race'.

'Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn upon people of color', says McIntosh (1990, p. 33). The article also highlights the myriad ways in which relations of dominance and power can be concealed, to the extent that oppression and privilege, which exist at diametric ends of the spectrum, are rendered impalpable. McIntosh further states that:

> As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage. I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege. (p. 31)

The article is read as part of a larger project that includes an introductory lecture, small group student-led seminars and Internet discussion groups as well as the

discussion of various case studies that address issues of race and oppression. This process provides the teacher candidates with a broader context in which to read, discuss and understand the articles. The final discussion part of the process provides the students with further opportunities to discuss their reflections on the article and table questions and queries that may have emerged for them. This process is heavily student-focused, thereby limiting the possibility of the process being controlled by the instructors and it also gives the students the opportunity to be much more open in their conversations.

Employing discourse analysis, the candidates' responses to the article were analyzed for the ideas, messages, values, beliefs and worldviews (ideological system) they reflect (Gee, 1988). Emerging themes were coded in an attempt to identify connections and inconsistencies among the responses, to develop the analytical categories that are being discussed in the following sections. We also employed a manifest and latent analysis (van Dijk, 1993) of the data wherein we addressed the specific comments of the participants as well as our analysis of their statements.

One unique aspect of this project, which informed the analysis, was that all of the members of the research team were members of racialized and minoritized groups. Three were members of visible racial groups while the other may be considered a member of a language minority group based on the salience of his accent. This served to provide a unique standpoint to not only the data analysis but also to interrogating the latent ideas and knowledge contained within the statements provided by the participants.

Membership in groups that are racialized provides a unique standpoint (DuBois, 1973; Collins, 2000) that is based on multiple lenses through which the world is seen. Not only are we privileged to the culture and communications of marginalized groups but by necessity, we are also aware of the culture of the dominant. The double-consciousness (DuBois, 1973) that pervades our existence enables us to survive within both worlds, but also provides us with an epistemological saliency that underscores our analyses. It is the ability to sojourn from margin to centre (hooks, 2000) that created multiple lenses through which the analysis of the data has been filtered, thereby further strengthening our latent analysis of the data.

Moreover, Rhodes (1994) argues:

> While recognizing that in a 'racially' conscious society, the colour of an interviewer's skin is likely to influence the way that a person responds, it is erroneous to assume that a qualitative difference necessarily implies that one type of account is intrinsically superior to another. Each is interesting and meaningful in its own right. A different account given to a Black interviewer does not invalidate that given to a White, although it may well cast it in a new light. (p. 548)

As researchers we are well aware of the ways in which race is implicated in all aspects of research and we have attempted to locate ourselves in this discussion to provide the reader with information regarding the epistemic standpoints that inform our understanding and analysis. The inclusion of such information also provides space for examining questions that point to the notion of researching the 'Other', in this case the other being white. It also points to the academic morass within which many

minoritized researchers function. When we conduct research on our community we are often accused of lacking objectivity (Hanchard, 2000); when we conduct research outside of our community, questions emerge regarding our ability (both academically and professionally) to conduct research and analyse the responses of each group. We are cognizant of this dilemma and exercise our expertise with multiple social groups.

Findings

An analysis of the teacher candidates' written responses, the specific aspects of the article to which they targeted their response, and the underlying emotional sentiment expressed in their writings, were combined to inform our understanding of the salient themes. We have identified three primary responses to the article: ideological incongruence; liberalist notions of individualism and meritocracy; and negating white capital. These are by no means discreet categories; participants' voices as well as our analyses move with fluidity across categories. These responses reflect the attitudes and perspectives of the white teacher candidates, both males and females,[2] in the study.

What was interesting was that the responses of the candidates were not clearly distinct from one program to the other, however the quotes that have been used do reflect the views of significant numbers of the participants. In addition, the reader should be aware that there were other themes that emerged, which highlighted the ability on the part of a number of participants to critically analyze the impact and existence of white privilege; as well as the desire on the part of the teacher candidates to be provided with the concrete skills that would enable them to effectively address issues of difference in their classrooms. However, for the purposes of this paper we have identified three that were highly salient and emerged repeatedly among the participants. These themes also serve to highlight and underscore the continued difficulty that teacher candidates have in addressing the notion of race and white privilege in schools, and further point to the importance of continued research and work in the areas of social difference and oppression in education.

Ideological incongruence

Ideological incongruence refers to the dilemma experienced by individuals when their ideological or belief sets are incompatible. This incongruence can occur when their belief regarding a particular set of ideas may differ from experiences related to that belief set. For example, an individual may in theory support the ideals of employment equity, however they may be unwilling to see it implemented. The implementation of employment equity initiatives often become couched in the language of 'reverse discrimination' and regarded as taking placements in teachers college and jobs away from qualified white candidates. Further, there is also the notion that the minoritized people who may hold these positions as a result of employment equity initiatives, are less qualified and have been placed in the position simply because of their race. These

explanations or rationales provide the white person with information that can be used to ensure the maintenance of their initial belief set.

Similarly, people can engage in and/or reinforce racist/sexist practices while simultaneously making claims to racial innocence. Henry and Tator (1994), for example, use the term 'democratic racism' to define this incongruence specifically in relation to the issue of racism. The authors define democratic racism as:

> An ideology that permits and justifies the maintenance of two apparently conflicting sets of values. One set consists of a commitment to a democratic society motivated by egalitarian values of fairness, justice and equality. In conflict with these liberal values, a second set of attitudes and behaviours includes negative feelings about people of color that carry the potential for discrimination. (p. 1)

Participants in the study reflected this particular thought pattern and the following quotes are some examples of this ideological incongruence:

> I think that grappling with this issue is difficult for many people of European descent. As children we are told repeatedly and with great conviction that all people are equal, regardless of race, class, ethnicity or any other factor; that all people have the potential to do anything they choose. To begin to deal with these issues outlined in these articles is to go back and re-evaluate all of these very well intentioned fantasies, to revamp our socialization and belief system to acknowledge the truth. (WF)

> As a white male … I grew up believing that if someone works hard then they will be able to achieve almost anything. I assumed that people who achieved little were fully responsible for their situation, ignoring the fact that not everyone in this society starts off on the same playing field. I did not take into account that members of the dominant society are privileged and that others have been disadvantaged. (WM)

> My predominant response to a discussion of racism and white privilege is one of wanting to retreat from an overwhelming and seemingly impossible task and to avoid paralyzing feelings of guilt about my privilege. (WM)

A significant issue that was highlighted for the white teacher candidates was that the ideologies that framed their understanding of self, and their positioning in society, have been socially constructed. The knowledge that their ancestors, using various tools of domination and oppression, have created a society in which their benefits and privileges have been amassed at the expense of other racial and ethnic groups, elicits a sense of confusion about the legitimacy of their own position. This new information that challenges their personal, cultural and ideological underpinnings forces them to grapple with seemingly incongruous positions.

In our work with teacher candidates, we have observed on multiple occasions the level of discomfort that is experienced on the part of the candidates when discussions of oppression, marginalization, colonization, racism, etc, are initiated. This discomfort is similarly evidenced in many university spaces when students, particularly white students, are asked to consider the possibility of alternative interpretations of history, society or social relations. Black and Third World feminists (for example, Amos & Parmar, 2001; Lorde, 2001) have discussed the reactions of white feminists when their assumptions regarding feminist ideology and sites of political struggles have been challenged. According to Lerner (2001), Black history is beginning to serve

whites as an antidote to centuries of racist indoctrination by providing essential knowledge without which a more truly democratic, non-racist society cannot be built (p. 45). In much the same way, indigenous scholars (Smith, 1999) have discussed the importance of including indigenous knowledges as important and necessary information for challenging imperialism, oppression and domination in educational and social spheres. However, with the introduction of this new information, the way in which the information is heard, understood or interpreted, differs for many groups of people. For dominant groups there has been the inevitable challenge to their reality system thereby resulting in a degree of uncertainty, guilt, anger and at times, the calls of reverse discrimination.

The difficulty experienced on the part of the candidates to acknowledge the existence of alternative ideologies, can result in a focus on to their own personal sense of suffering and oppression. The inclusion of the notion of reverse discrimination, or the maintenance of racism as individual aberrant acts for example, limits their ability to move their understanding of an existing situation away from the personal and the individual to effectively examine the underlying systemic and institutional structures that reinforce racism. The maintenance of this focus on the self, their feelings of discomfort, guilt, anger, frustration, etc, serves to ensure that there is limited space and energy to address the needs of other groups whose very existence is mired in oppression and inequity.

According to hooks (1994):

> Oftentimes intellectual work compels confrontation with harsh realities. It may remind us that domination and oppression continue to shape the lives of everyone, especially Black people and people of color. Such work not only draws us closer to the suffering, it makes us suffer. (p. 164)

It is this suffering that makes the process of change all the more difficult. The reality is that racism hurts all of us. For those of us who are racialized, the sources of discomfort and suffering originate from multiple sites, the physical, the economic and the mental, to name but a few. However, the pain of not addressing racism is all the more dangerous particularly in educational spheres where the minds, subjectivities and futures of minoritized youth are influenced by the information present in the curriculum and in the interactions with their teachers.

Another way in which this ideological incongruity is evidenced, which further underscores the power that the white teacher candidates possess, is the manner in which they reframe information to reinforce their ideological bent. This reinforcement is also achieved through a process of discounting information that challenges their belief system.

Citing Green (1971), Richardson (1996) also indicates that it is possible for people to have inconsistent belief sets that can be held in different clusters thereby limiting the possibility of one set challenging the other. An example of this would be the manner in which people voice racist ideas about a particular group to a member of that group, but preface it with statements such as 'But I don't mean you, you are not like them', or 'How is it that you are not like "them"?' There is

limited connection between the two sets of ideas, therefore the interrogation of the inconsistency of those ideas is stultified. In much the same way, teacher candidates can have sets of beliefs about minoritized[3] groups, but find explanations for the success of individual members of the group. Ensuring, therefore, that there is the continued separation of the ideological sets enables the candidates to provide justifications for their ideas, while simultaneously limiting the degree of dissonance that they experience.

The dissonance or discomfort that is identified by the teacher candidates in the programs can also be regarded as a way through which they are able to move the focus away from the issues of racism and discrimination, to recenter the focus on whiteness. According to one student:

> I am very concerned by the privilege any person holds and am tired of having to feel like I should apologize for being male. Treat me as an equal and I will treat you as one. Paint me with a single brush and think of me as evil without knowing who I am and the struggles I face everyday and you have become an oppressor. (WM)

It is interesting to note that this participant was very aware of the forms of oppression that he believed were being directed against him and the ways in which they impacted on him. However, in large part he had been unable to transfer that sense of being unfairly targeted to the arguments being discussed in the article regarding discrimination that is being levied against other groups. This sense of reverse discrimination tended to be prevalent mostly amongst the white males in the study. It speaks to the manner in which many whites are unable to shift away from their sense of entitlement to particular forms of treatment for themselves. It is this sense of entitlement that underscores the notion of white privilege.

This recentering of whiteness ensures that the focus of the discussion remains on white people and the apparent burden they are subjected to because of employment equity and affirmative action programs, and their overwhelming sense of victimization (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2000). We would add that the emotions contribute to a continued investment in the oppression of minoritized groups. Therefore, in attempting to engage discussions of whiteness among white teacher candidates, teacher educators must remain aware of the ways in which the anger, frustration and general sense of uneasiness among participants can lead to the opposite effect. As indicated earlier, this form of recentering of whiteness is tangibly different from the discussion and writings on whiteness and white privilege that seeks to identify whiteness in an attempt to change its continued dominance in all aspects of society.

Levine-Rasky (2000a) cites McIntyre (1997), who uses the term 'white talk' to describe the behaviours and strategies that white teacher candidates adopt to avoid acknowledging or naming their privilege. White talk refers to:

> How uncomfortable the participants felt dealing with racism and used strategies such as derailing the conversation, evading questions, dismissing counter arguments, withdrawing from the discussion, remaining silent, interrupting speakers and topics, and colluding with each other in creating a 'culture of niceness' that made it very difficult to 'read the white world'. (McIntyre, 1997, p. 46)

Brodkey (1995), in her discussion of the manner in which teacher candidates respond to discussions around multiculturalism uses the term 'white noise' to refer to the:

> … din of common sense … which cynically denies that difference matters, by dismissing it as superficial or maligning it as divisive. (Cited in McKoy, 2000, p. 242)

McKoy (2000) citing examples from literature, poetry and songs, regards white noise as a mechanism that acts as a sound of comfort that renders only familiar ideologies and beliefs audible to whites.

Therefore, through the adoption of several coping mechanisms such as recentering the focus of the discussion, focusing on the perceived difficulty that whites have experienced, and, trivializing different sources of information, the teacher candidates are enabled to maintain their incongruous ideological sets thereby maintaining the systemic injustices in schooling.

The difficulty experienced on the part of the candidates to acknowledge the existence of alternative ideologies, can result in a focus on to their own personal sense of suffering and oppression. The inclusion of the notion of reverse discrimination, or the maintenance of racism as individual aberrant acts, for example, limits their ability to move their understanding of the situation away from the personal and the individual. The maintenance of this focus on the self, their feelings of discomfort, guilt, anger, frustration, etc, serves to ensure that there is no space to address the needs of other groups whose very existence is mired in oppression and inequity.

Negating white capital

Another reaction to the notion of white privilege was that some of the teacher candidates in the study attempted to deny the existence of white privilege and its attendant capital and material benefits. At times, for those who may have begun to actively interrogate the material reality of their white privilege, there were attempts on their part to explain its presence thereby ensuring the continued separation of their ideological sets. There was a range of emotional responses that were evidenced in the writings of the teacher candidates that were specifically related to the implication that they possessed unearned privileges (McIntosh, 1990; Kailin, 2002). This ranged from outright anger and aggression towards the author and minorities in general to a sense of guilt. At times a form of emotional paralysis was evidenced that resulted in the inability to move beyond the ideological construction of the term to understand the reification of its impact. And, as Solomon and Allen (1995) indicate, 'with their knowledge base challenged, many students felt vulnerable' (p. 55). That vulnerability was evidenced in their responses as indicated in the following quotes from the teacher candidates:

> McIntosh's tone is castrating, counter-productive and intrinsically feeble-minded in character with its ethos of negative energy. Why should whites (and males) forever be made to feel guilty by would-be do-gooders like McIntosh. (WM)

> Whites may well be over-privileged in some settings, but the author fails to point out any negative aspects of being white. To highlight some negative aspects, minorities have affirmative action for attaining certain jobs, and can use discrimination as an advantage against whites. This article is one-sided with the emphasis pointing to minorities being oppressed. (WM)

> How can she [McIntosh] say there is 'white privilege' if when I applied to become a teacher, there was a clearly stated option for anyone of a minority to state that? (WM)

The above quotes have clearly expressed the sentiments of many of the candidates. They strongly believe that the rewards that have been afforded them have been due to their individual efforts. Second, there is the clear belief that minorities are the ones who have been privileged at the expense of whites. Again, there is this tendency to interact with information on an individualistic level, and also to examine the ways in which they may have been affected. There is a continued failure to examine the larger historical contexts that have attributed to, and buttress the contemporary reification of injustices. Further to this, the group that felt the most threatened by these discussions of privilege—that is, white males—provided some of the strongest statements as evidenced in the above quote regarding McIntosh's 'castrating tone'.

In an apparent attempt to reconcile their beliefs and experiences and perhaps abate some of the internal tensions and conflicts, many of the candidates engaged in discussions regarding the inclusion of multicultural applications in the classroom. Given the celebratory application of multiculturalism in education (Troyna, 1993; Harper, 1997; Powell, 1999) such a focus does not lead to any critical interrogation into their implicatedness in white privilege.

According to some participants:

> If ignorance continues we cannot move forward in combating racism. One way of doing this is to have monthly themes that examine *other* [emphasis added] cultures. This can be done by having guest speakers who are natives of various cultures, decorations around the room depicting a particular culture, eating food from foreign places, include personal reflections from students and so on. Encouraging students to conduct studies about places that they are not familiar with and present it to the class describing the way of living, via role-playing a person from that culture. (WF)

There are several problems inherent in this particular response. First, the teacher has effectively removed herself and the role that she plays in this particular dynamic thereby eliminating the possibility of any critical interrogation of her role in replicating power dynamics. She has located the problem of racism squarely in the lap of ignorance and lack of knowledge about culture, thereby removing the need for an analysis of issues of power, dominance, historical colonization and oppression fostered primarily by whites against other groups. The contemporary manifestations of the power differentials that are associated with the multicultural celebration of differences are ignored, thereby erasing the focus on the systemic factors that underlie racism.

Second, there is the continued objectification and exotification of the 'other' wherein which white culture and history is regarded as central. The reduction of the histories of other groups to the traditional multicultural fare of the three 'S', 'saris, samosas and steel bands' (Troyna, 1993, p. 26). According to Daniel (in press):

… whiteness becomes the norm by which other groups are further exoticized through the binaries that are inherent in the articulation of the displays. (p. 15)

The continued failure to implicate whiteness in discussion of societal change enables the teacher candidates to effectively remove themselves from the change process, thereby re-entrenching the normalcy and centrality of whiteness and white reality systems. This enables white privilege and dominance to remain unchecked and unchallenged. Whiteness then becomes regarded:

… as a case of historical accident, rather than a characteristic cultural/historical construction, achieved through white domination. (Dyer, 1988, p. 46)

According to the following participant:

The author's list of 'daily effects of white privilege' struck me as being either insignificant or even illogical. … If white people work hard and build a solid country like Canada for centuries, I don't see any derived benefits they may have as a 'privilege', I simply see it as something they have earned. (WF)

According to another student:

Some of the points on the checklist are too narrow and seem to blame a person for their ancestors. I could see this making a person uncomfortable in a group environment, which should not be the goal of this exercise. (WM)

The candidates' formulation is left at the level of white people rather than moving to an understanding of systems of whiteness. This conflation of whiteness and white skin (Levine-Rasky, 2000a) makes it difficult for students to move beyond their feelings of anger and frustration to develop a clearer understanding of the way in which whiteness is also a constructed category, and one that comes with significant forms of capital that is seldom afforded to marginalized groups. According to Kailin (2002):

'Whiteness' as a social identity is invisible to whites, and the social and economic benefits that have accrued to whites over the course of our history must be understood in the context of white supremacy. (pp. 182–183)

McLaren *et al.* (2001), for example, identify the construction of the racial category 'white' as an economic and political venture aimed at securing the control and power in the hands of the Euro-Americans. These discourses were further used to reinforce the imposed superiority of whites while justifying the continued enslavement of the Africans, for example. This history of control and domination has come to mark 'whiteness' as a taken for granted norm.

Negating whiteness and its attendant capital is also a refusal to acknowledge how white people are implicated in relations of social domination and subordination and instances of economic exploitation. There is a continued investment in ensuring the continued invisibility of whiteness. Frankenberg (1993) regards whiteness as being material, cultural, subjective and relational categories that are not static. Instead, they are co-constructed by historical, contemporary, local and racial variables. However, whiteness has come to be associated with reproduction, dominance, normativity and privilege.

Liberalist notions of individualism and meritocracy

Various studies have indicated the lack of preparedness of the current force of teacher candidates for working with minoritized populations (Solomon & Allen, 2001; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996; Sleeter, 1992). One of the factors that fuels this lack of preparedness is the way in which they position themselves within liberalist notions of social movement and the individualistic way in which they frame their analysis and understanding of social forces. The larger historical context within which social relations have developed and the underlying forces that influence those interactions are seldom considered. Therefore, the exclusions from the curriculum and the partisan versions of history, etc, are regarded as accurate representations of the world.

> One can overcome all obstacles through enough hard work and determination. (WF)

> Not all minorities are dropouts, so what advantages did they have? How did they make it through the system? Have they been fortunate enough to accept the dominant ideology, and in so doing survived the educational system? Have these questions been researched? I just think that it is important to not always complain or criticize the system but to look at the minorities who have made it through the system and have them provide insight on how they achieved it. This does not mean that minorities should conform and ignore the faults of the system but to encourage them, and help them through the transition period, which may be a long time. (WM)

> I have worked as a cashier, at a gas station, for parks and recreation, waitressing, etc. These are not jobs where connections and being white helped me. It was hard work. (WF)

> I believe all of my accomplishments have come through hard work as opposed to being privileged. (WM)

Significant numbers of white candidates are locked into the individualistic and meritocratic view of education. There is a clear sense that if people work hard enough they will overcome the myriad obstacles. There is limited interrogation of the way in which the ideals of meritocracy and individualism are also impacted by social conditions.

According to Henry and Tator (1994) there is a tendency on the part of:

> White Canadians to dismiss easily the accumulated body of evidence documenting racial prejudice and different treatment, including victims' testimonies and experiences. (p. 1)

bell hooks (1994) also states that:

> … Often their rage erupts because they believe that all ways of looking that highlight the difference subvert the liberal belief in a universal subjectivity that they think will make racism disappear. They have a deep emotional investment in the myth of sameness even as their actions reflect the primacy of sameness. (p. 167)

Among our participants, this liberalism was quite evident as indicated in some of the above quotes. There is this continued belief that we all have the same opportunities, or at the very least, access to the opportunities. The failure or success of a particular individual or group is inexorably linked to individual effort and agency. According to one of the participants, the fact that white people control most of the wealth in Canada is based on the fact that they got there first and worked hard to

achieve what they wanted. He could see no reason why they should have to give up what they have worked hard to achieve. If other groups work hard enough they too will be successful.

There is the strategic invocation of historical amnesia when there is an examination of historical events. The treatment of Aboriginal groups and the existence of slavery in Canada have been effectively and conveniently excised out of the historical landscape. Through the use of language and the obsessive compulsion to adopt the blinders of liberalism and meritocracy, white Canadians have developed an effective form of resistance that has been deeply entrenched in the political and social geography.

As mentioned earlier, Henry and Tator (1994) have used the term democratic racism to explain the manner in which ideals of democracy have been wed to racist practices, whereby there are sets of conflicting values at work. Notions of justice, fairness and equality, for example, are very much present in the social fabric; however, there is a failure to effectively interrogate the manner in which policies that are aimed at ensuring these said values fail to be supported. Given, therefore, the belief in the existence of a democratic society, efforts at addressing issues of racism that require changes in the current system become languaged in terms that suggest an attempt on the part of insurgent groups to destroy the system. Race and racism then are regarded as realities and sites of contention that would best be addressed by ignoring it.

Dlamini (2002) talks of the manner in which the continued focus on the individual effectively limits any systematic challenge of the systemic structures. When racism is read as acts on the part of individuals, the marking of the self as not being a racist, precludes any real examination of the system. According to Levine-Rasky (2000b):

> … students tend to approach the problem of inequality from a personal perspective rather than through its societal or systemic manifestations. (p. 264)

Again, this further limits the possibility of interrogating their ideological set. Further, it serves to distance personal implications in the maintenance of systemic inequities. According to another candidate:

> I am not claiming that we are all on equal footing, but I think this article discounts the individual and their aspirations, regardless of the colour of one's skin. If as humans we do not strive to better ourselves (on numerous levels) then we could never progress. Do not discount individual aspirations. Do not discount the positive roles parents can have. … Do discount the notion that skin colour defines who you are, where you are going and what you can do. (WF)

This quote highlights three highly prevalent attitudes within liberalist discourses; discounting of the effects of racism, the focus on the individual, and the continued 'pathologizing' of minority families. The manifest content of the quote most succinctly represents the liberalist ideology regarding the importance of individual choice and value, which we do not discount. However, there is the attendant failure to examine the systemic obstacles that impact on individual agency and choice thereby limiting the pursuit of any real change amongst the teacher candidates.

Additionally, there is the continued refusal to admit to the destructive impact of racism believing instead that groups should strive to better themselves. The words in

the above quote identify the often-expressed sentiments of many liberal whites, which, though in and of themselves may not be offensive, the enactment of those ideas in a classroom can be extremely destructive. The failure on the part of students will be attributed to a lack of individual effort; therefore the teacher has not attributed it to a particular racial group. The resulting belief on the part of the teacher is that they are not racist, therefore there is no need to change their behavior or perspectives, thereby ensuring the continued inequitable practices in their classrooms.

Third, the teacher candidate in the above quote has identified the importance of the role of the family in fostering success amongst the students. Again, we do not deny the importance and centrality of that role; however, there is a failure to examine the larger social context that denies minoritized parents access to the resources that will enable them to provide for and support their children such as adequate employment opportunities. Therefore, while the success of the students becomes attributable to parental involvement, so too is their failure. How then do teacher educators foster in teacher candidates the ability to consider the multiple perspectives inherent in their beliefs and practices?

Implications for teacher education for a racially diverse society

This study highlights several important areas that should be addressed in the education of white teachers in preparing them to work with diverse student groups as well as addressing issues of discrimination. These include the importance of prior knowledge of the teacher candidates; providing spaces within the program wherein which they can address their questions and concerns; preparing them for the range of emotions they may experience; and providing concrete strategies for including anti-discriminatory practices in their classroom. Finally the study highlights the role that knowledge regarding one's racial identity development can play in learning to work with racially ascribed differences in society.

All the participants enter the program with prior knowledge regarding racism and oppression. Many whites often indicate that because of the communities in which they were raised they are often unaware of issues of race or racism. However, in Canada today, even in the most remote community there is access to books, the media and various forms of cultural information. Therefore, providing the teacher candidates with opportunities to interrogate some of their prior exposure and ideas regarding varied racial and ethnic groups as well as their understanding of the ways in which these perceptions may inform their future work in the schools, can become an entry point into the discussions of privilege and oppression.

Such discussions also serve to bring to the surface many of the preconceptions that white participants may take for granted as a norm. For example, in a class taught by one of the co-authors, a cursory questioning of a group of counseling students at a community college a few years ago about their knowledge regarding other social groups unearthed multiple stereotypical comments that were accepted as fact. These included the idea that all blacks can dance, all Jewish people are rich and therefore did not have any real problems that they would need counseling for, and also that

Aboriginal peoples' drug and alcohol addiction were responsible for many of the social problems in their communities. These responses provided the instructor with the opportunity to interrogate and then reframe some of the responses specifically highlighting the impact in the counseling situation.

Such a situation can be used with teacher candidates by drawing on their own taken for granted assumptions. For example, how does a teacher respond to a student who is expected to perform well versus a student who is regarded as having behavioral or academic learning deficits? Many people are able to recognize discrimination in various forms and this can be used to develop scenarios based on such notions as class, race, popularity and body mass to explore ideas regarding discrimination on a larger scale. Using similar scenarios the candidates can discuss situations in which they may have been exposed to such ideas, and the ways in which such ideas can inform their teaching practices as well as the interactions with students. This facilitates discussion of discrimination in a larger context as well as focusing it on specific sites of discrimination.

Such discussions also can serve to facilitate their engagement with their personal racial identity development. Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003) indicate that a person's identity becomes a lens through which they see themselves and which informs their understanding of others. Hardiman (2001) believes that it is important for whites to understand the extent to which their perceptions of self and other had been historically constructed. It was also important to understand the extent to which that construction was embedded in systems of normalization such as the church, the media, school, and even in the stories and folklores that formed a central aspect of the socialization of most white people. Developing an understanding of the functioning of social constructions that serve to mark one group as dominant and the unquestionable centre also provides space for the understanding that there is also a form of social construction that simultaneously marks others as subordinate. It is at this stage, which Hardiman (2001) refers to as resistance, that whites can most effectively begin to work towards unsettling dominant racial relations. Discussions of white racial identity point to the importance of fostering non-oppressive social relations amongst whites and other social groups and of seeking a rearticulation of whiteness.

Within the field of teacher education, the notions of social constructions, and the rearticulation of race, which accompany these notions, become important strategies that can facilitate change. It is important for the teacher candidates to understand that their learning has to incorporate multiple sites of new knowledge regarding race and racialization; it is not simply a matter of engaging in oppositional subjectivities that pit one group against the others. Rather it is about developing an understanding of the importance of understanding the ways in which their understanding of what it means to be black, Chinese, South-Asian, are categories that are replete with assumptions and that these assumptions impact on their interactions with these students. Within that same frame of reference they can also begin to understand the way in which their understanding of whiteness informs their articulation of it, not only with regard to their sense of self but also in the manner that their whiteness is performed in relation to others.

Another implication that the research points to is the importance of preparing the teacher candidates for the range of emotions that they may encounter when addressing issues of equity and oppression in this particular forum. Many of them are often surprised at the way that they respond to some of the information and have clearly expressed that there tends to be a range of emotions including anger, guilt and paralysis. Preparing the students for these expectations can serve two primary purposes: (a) they will realize that their behavior or responses is normal and acceptable depending on the stage they are in their analysis of issues regarding oppression and; (b) it also prevents them from using their experience and emotions as a rationale for not engaging in the anti-racism work that needs to be done.

In their research, Lesage *et al*. (2002) present the strategies used by sociology professor Mia Tuan at the University of Oregon. Her theory is that race is a contentious issue and emotion and pain are part of the process of interrogation. Tuan addresses whiteness up front in her initial class and warns students at the outset to 'step outside their comfort zone, with the instructor providing safety'. She also conducts a mandatory weekly discussion group, with trained facilitators studying to be counselors, where students are encouraged to talk openly about race including what they feel about the issues raised in class with mediators. If an outburst occurs, Tuan asks students to sit, reflect and write for a few minutes. Weekly reflections are expected to class discussions, readings and ideas and anonymous narratives are addressed in class (p. 168). Tuan's pedagogical experience relies primarily on student input. Practices such as this also provide a site of sharing wherein which people can work alongside others to address these difficult issues.

The recognition that people are not alone in their struggles serves to delineate areas where people can align and work through some of the difficulties they are experiencing. It should be clearly stated that the candidates could use the members of the classroom as a source of support rather than it being a silent assumption.[4] Actions such as this serve to support the teacher candidates and to move them away from the thinking that the program is only interested in the experiences of oppressed groups thereby limiting their opportunities to remain entrenched in this particular thought pattern. One student for example states:

> I feel that just because I am white I am 'labeled' as being a racist when in fact it could not be further from the truth. We need to remember that some people may take advantage of this 'privilege' but others may not want to be punished for being in that same category just because of color. It would be interesting to hear the views of how such individuals of the 'white' class feel. (WF)

This statement expresses several sentiments. There is the sense that the individual is being unfairly labeled because of her whiteness and this causes feelings of frustration for her. Further to this, it underscores the manner in which the experiences and sense of indignation of whites becomes recentered in the discussion and, third there is the notion of wanting to connect with others who may be having similar experiences. Therefore, recognizing these behaviors and providing options for addressing them, can circumvent the process of entrenchment by taking the focus away from a feeling of victimization to the recognition that this work is part of a process of change towards

social justice. An understanding of the ways in which social relations are constructed and systemic becomes important in helping students to see that the discussions of whiteness is about systemic injustices within which they have become consciously and unconsciously implicated. And as Freire (1996) indicates, dialogue becomes central to the naming and renaming of human experience and possibilities.

Another important implication of the research is the necessity of providing the teacher candidates with concrete tools and strategies for incorporating equitable practices in their classrooms. The continued focus on multiculturalism[5] as the solution to all the inequities of the education system continues to be a liberalist trope that limits and restricts transformation and ensures the systems of domination and oppression remain in place. In addition to this, it placates its proponents with the idea that something is being done thereby eliminating the need for any real interrogation of the role of systems of domination or of whiteness and its attendant systems of power. We believe that multicultural discourses do have a role in the discussion; however it should be regarded as a starting point not the terminal space. As teacher educators we should ensure that there are strategies that the candidates can employ to facilitate their movement towards more critical discourses such as anti-racism, critical race pedagogy and also varied forms of feminist interventions. But concrete tools and anti-racism strategies should not be perceived as the teacher's desire for classroom prescription. Here Gillborn (2000, p. 486) warns about the complexity of implementing an anti-racism pedagogy:

> There is no blueprint for successful anti-racism, no one 'correct' way. What succeeds at one time, or in one context, may not be appropriate at a later date or in another context. Racism changes; it works differently through different processes ... and changes with particular institutional contexts. Anti-racism must recognize and adapt to this complexity.

As a pedagogical device to critical race theory and 'whiteness', Giroux (1997) forwards the challenge to inject the power of mass media into classrooms in an attempt to disrupt the 'social imaginary of students regarding how they view themselves, others and the larger society' (p. 293). His critique underscores the relevance of two popular Hollywood films, *Dangerous minds* and *Suture* and their unique and divergent appeal to representations, reproductions and limitations of 'whiteness'. While it is apparent that, based on analyses of these popular texts, there will be tensions and resistance from students that problematizes assumptions about race and white experience, it is in this context that teacher educators address the historical legacy of oppression and a yearning for radical democracy for all.

In the same way that the media has been historically employed in creating normalizing practices, it can also be employed in the deconstruction of those practices. Additionally the discussion of films provides a space for multiple interpretations of the information and messages on the screen. This provides a space for understanding the multiple knowledges and understandings that are present within any social landscape.

Solomon (2002) has effectively employed the cross-race dyad approach in which students of different racial groups are paired during their placements. This paring

serves many purposes. First, it can become a form of modeling particularly for white students who are engaged with unfamiliar environments. Second, it provides students with opportunities to work outside of their homogenous communities and can provide them with additional humanistic lenses through which they can interact with teacher candidates of different races. These human interactions, though occurring on an individual level, in the long run can create alliances that have a systemic effect; as teachers begin to understand the ways in which different groups function, their interactions with students from those groups can be affected thereby serving to challenge and destroy many of the social stereotypes including those about whites.

An added issue that the research highlights is the need for the continued naming of, and a rearticulation of whiteness. This rearticulation should be clarified and its implications clearly noted for both white teacher candidates and candidates of color. Additional research needs to be conducted to identify the strategies that lead to a change in the understanding of the teacher candidates regarding notions of race, racism and whiteness.

In as much as we believe that notions of whiteness and white privilege need to be interrogated, it should not be addressed in ways that serve to reinscribe whiteness as the normative centre for discussion while continuing to marginalize other social groups. Nor do we ascribe to the engagement of this as a process of guilt making. Instead, we have attempted to ensure that in our role as teacher educators, we provide spaces for change, which necessitates the examination of multiple contexts, spaces and the inclusion of multiple voices. These carving out of 'spaces' mean reenergizing and restructuring mainstream teacher education programming to advance whiteness and anti-racist theories, in addition to establishing inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary partnerships within the academy and outside organizations.

The ongoing cultural project to challenge pre-service students to examine, critique and transform paradigms of 'whiteness' is muted by liberalist notions of meritocracy, negating responses to white privilege and ideological incongruence. The desire to change the ingrained characteristics of white thinking and acting require everyone's efforts. As bell hooks (1989) so eloquently concludes:

> … it is our collective responsibility as people of colour and as white people who are committed to ending white supremacy to help one another. (p. 118)

Notes

1. See *Off white: readings on race, power and society* (Fine *et al.*, 1997), for an extended critical analysis of whiteness and 'white privilege'.
2. In this study we have isolated the voices of white male and female candidates. The abbreviations (WM) represent white males, (WF) represent white females, (CF) represent females of colour and (CM) represent males of colour. The perspectives of minoritized candidates will be analyzed in another paper.
3. The term minoritized is used in this context rather than racialized to highlight the fact that whites are also members of a racial group however their racialization affords them benefits that are seldom available to minority groups. The usage of the term also serves to include whites as

a racial group thereby reinforcing the idea that in challenging racist practices, whiteness must also be interrogated.

4.   See Solomon's (2002) work on cross-race dyad system that provides the structure for candidates of different racial groups to collaborate and be mutually supportive in their communities of practice.

5.   In the Canadian context, researchers distinguish between a multiculturalist approach and an anti-racist approach. The former is associated with a liberal stance, the latter with a critical-democratic stance. See Dei (1996).

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