



Envisioning Spaces of Anti-racist Pedagogy in Teacher Education Programs

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INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE CONTEXT

I began my teaching career as an English as a Second Language teacher in 2005. During my second week on the job, my co-teacher and I were monitoring the cafeteria when she leaned over and whispered to me, “[Y]ou know, it’s the Latino kids who are ruining this school.” I did not respond.

This comment was made to me ten years after Ladson-Billings (1995) printed her seminal article on culturally relevant pedagogy—the article that I had pored over in graduate school as I earned my license in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Ladson-Billings began her article by stating:

Teacher education programs throughout the nation have coupled their efforts at reform with revised programs committed to social justice and

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equity. Thus, their focus has become the preparation of prospective teachers in ways that support equitable and just educational experiences for all students. (p. 466)

I begin with this quotation because of the importance of the idea of teaching for equity. However, I feel that after 26 years, we have not lived up to Ladson-Billings's convictions. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2021b) continues to tell the narrative of United States schools in demographic data. In the most recent statistics of public-school teachers, roughly 79% were White, 9% were Hispanic, 7% were Black, 2% were Asian, 2% were of two or more races, and 1% were American Indian/Alaska Native; additionally, those who were Pacific Islander made up less than 1% of public-school teachers.

Not surprisingly, the data for college and university faculty (with the exception of Asian/Pacific Islanders which in this statistic combine the categories) mirrored the public-school teacher demographics with 75% White, 12% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% Black, and 6% Latino (NCES, 2021a). While the data for public-school children indicated that of the 50.7 million students in prekindergarten through grade 12 in fall 2018, roughly only 47% were White, 27% were Hispanic, 15% were Black, 5% were Asian students, and 2% were American Indian/Alaska Native/Pacific Islander (NCES, 2021c).

Why do we harp on these statistics and repeat them over and over in articles and chapters? It is not that White teachers are unable to support diverse student populations; I myself am a White, monolingual, cisgender female teacher, and I feel that I have been a great support to my students. However, all teachers, but White teachers in particular, need to continue to reexamine their privilege and their personal belief frameworks as they continue the hard and important work of teaching, particularly in an era when the former president of the United States publicly denounced Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a detriment to the country, and over half of U.S. states are prohibiting, in some form of legislation, the teaching of CRT in public schools (Ononye & Walker, 2021).

Within this chapter, I propose the use of integrating strategic empathy (Zembylas, 2012) in teacher education programs as a means to support pre- and in-service teachers as they seek to make sense of, and ultimately to enact change in, education. I examine one way of moving forward by working with fields adjacent to education that will ultimately support

educators in enacting an anti-racist pedagogy. In the interest of transparency, I will begin with my positionality statement.

Positionality

I am writing this chapter from several identities: a mother of a young, White boy whose privilege is already apparent; a professor preparing teachers for their work with language diversity students; a contributing member of a body of work on teachers' identities in the classroom; and a citizen of a country where I wish to see everyone treated equitably. I also write cautiously from the perspective of the prejudice that I personally experienced when I was younger as a Jewish student in a school system where my sister and I were the only non-Christians. I write from the genocide of my ancestors. I write in response to the co-teacher who told me that the Latino students were ruining the school. Finally, I write with the understanding that, while I feel that at times, my experiences with religious prejudice have shaped my social positioning, I ultimately choose "White" on the box that defines us in society's eyes.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN EDUCATION

In the 1970s, Derrick Bell expanded on the writing of critical theorists including Gramsci's work on cultural hegemony, or the manipulation by a dominant group to force their beliefs on subordinate groups in such a way as to enact power over them, to include race in the matrix of domination and subordination (Bates, 1975). Critical Race Theory (CRT) was first used within the confines of critical legal studies to highlight racial inequity in the law and to look at issues of ownership through a racial lens (Bell, 1994). Although Bell was the first to use the term CRT, DuBois (1903/2014) and Woodson (1933/2012) wrote, nearly a century earlier, through a lens that critically looked at issues of society through race. Both wrote about the long-lasting and far-reaching damage done to a population by ignoring their race's contributions to society and erasing them from the curriculum in school. DuBois wrote that the more control over the curriculum that one has, the more control over the population. Currently CRT is used in education to expose the power and privilege enacted by the "normalization" of White values and the undermining of other races' beliefs, customs, and languages.

It is through CRT that we can view the inconsistencies in schooling such as intersections of race, expectations and discipline (Pesta, 2018), the segregation that has occurred through neighborhood schooling and the rise of charter schools (Mickelson et al., 2015), the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006), and the hiring of a nearly all White teaching force (Hanford, 2020). By viewing school through a lens of CRT, we see the way those creating policy have used race to provide advantages to White, middle-class students to the detriment of their Black and Brown peers.

One example of using the CRT lens is when examining *Brown v. Board of Education* which we typically view as a positive moment in history that ended segregation in public schools. However, in the period after segregation, “many African American schools were simply closed and ... more than 38,000 African American educators lost their jobs” (Ahmad & Boser, 2014, p. 4). Through a lens of CRT, we see priorly ignored consequences of integration in which those making policy made no room for Black teachers. In a recent interview, George Mason University professor, Jenice View, explained that prior to integration, “Black teachers of all disciplines understood what they were trying to do. ... And every single disciplinary area, every single content area, was going to be a tool for dismantling institutional racism” (Terada, 2021, para. 22). When Black teachers were no longer in a position of power, this work largely stopped, leaving gaps in access to social capital for Black students.

While many in academia use CRT and other critical theories as a lens to view their research and have since the 1970s, the public was inundated with the phrase during the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement and countermovement. As our highly polarized nation explored the notion of CRT, it became a rallying cry for those supporting change and equity and a curse to those who wanted to maintain the status quo and deny the existence of racism in America.

CRT came under attack by politicians who, in nearly half of U.S. states, are currently drafting or have enacted legislation prohibiting the teaching of CRT in K-12 public schools (Ononye & Walker, 2021). For those of us who seek to teach through a CRT lens, this is precisely the systemic racism that we are speaking out against. While many of these bills do not mention CRT, specifically, they use wording that forbids teaching systemic racism, history that is deemed divisive, or history that could lead to (White) students feeling discomfort (Ononye & Walker, 2021). Deliberately, these bills are given names that include words such as *nondiscrimination* and *equity*; however, this type of legislation is a direct attack on those very

ideas and an attack on those of us in higher education who are seeking to protect the teaching of anti-racist education.

WHAT ARE WE DOING? COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES CAUTIOUSLY RISE TO THE CHALLENGE

Many colleges and universities are at least talking about, anti-racist pedagogy. A simple Google search elicits web pages dedicated to anti-racist teaching on campuses with information on faculty reading groups (Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning, 2021) and articles, TED talks, and podcasts all supporting anti-racist pedagogy (UNC Chapel Hill, 2021; Wheaton College, 2021; Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning, 2021). This is by no means an exhaustive list of the anti-racism resource pages affiliated with colleges and universities. My point in highlighting these pages is to emphasize that we have access to the research: the tools, the readings, the podcasts, and the articles—easy access. However, we still do not understand how these resources are being used by faculty.

Adjacent to these webpages are the Diversity Offices which often create or maintain them. While the inclusion of these offices may be a move in the right direction, some see the appointment of diversity officers on campuses as largely symbolic, giving this position limited power to enact changes (Parker, 2020). Kandaswamy (2007) cautions, that:

universities are frequently hostile to the presence of students of color on their campuses [while] simultaneously espousing the virtues of teaching racial tolerance or including ‘diverse’ experiences in their curriculum reflecting the convergence of colorblindness and multiculturalism as the dominant discourses of racism within university settings. (p. 6)

Kandaswamy contends that colorblindness “asserts that any consideration of race is itself racist” (p. 6) and even multiculturalism is problematic in its emphasis on the “heightened visibility of difference without a critical analysis of power” (p. 6). Again, steps to support anti-racist education are being taken, but cautiously, while those who attack CRT are taking more direct and aggressive action through legislation.

De-centering Whiteness

Discussions of race should not be just another topic on the syllabus. An article, a website, a lesson on White privilege is not going to make overarching changes in education and society as a whole. Trying to instill anti-racist pedagogy through a college course is not simple and must start with faculty critically examining their own curricula which is often met with resistance. As Jayakumar and Adamian (2017) explained:

White college students are often protected from confronting their own racial biases and assumptions ... primarily due to the centering of whiteness in curricula and instruction, the predominance of whites on higher education campuses, and the absence of challenges to white students' dispositions in regard to race and racism. (p. 916)

As White faculty and students struggle to identify their own experiences with race, Critical Whiteness theories are often used to help them recognize how their own White identities have shaped how they see the world (Lensmire & Snaza, 2010). Critical Whiteness theories shed light on how Whiteness has been centered in our cultural narrative and encourage a dismantling of the notion of a singular, centered White experience, to allow space for centering People of Color (Jupp et al., 2016).

White identity plays another role in how teachers perceive their ability to work with students of color. In my own work, I have seen teachers make great strides toward anti-racist education, only to center Whiteness by teaching through the lens of their own school experiences (King et al., 2020). Similarly, Phillips et al. (2019) described White faculty as seeking validation from their Black colleagues, in a way centering the conversation again on their Whiteness. Phillips et al. explained that “this need for affirmation for doing ‘good work’ can put undue pressure on a colleague of color to constantly affirm allyship” (p. 27). In order to center Blackness and other minority groups, there must first be a de-centering of Whiteness, or in psychoanalytic terms a way to “attend to both sides of a conflict ... a precursor to empathy” (Schmidt, 2018, p. 313), and reaching empathy takes time.

Teaching Through White Guilt

As teacher educators we also find ourselves in the highly complex situation of having to educate in multiple realms. We first must ensure that our colleagues have the knowledge and resources to teach pre- and in-service teachers through a CRT lens which is difficult enough. We then have the added pressures of supporting our pre- and in-service teachers through their reflective transitions to a place where they can teach their own students using anti-racist pedagogy—all while teaching within the limits of the restrictive laws of each state. It becomes clear why we tend to spin our wheels at the surface level of a multicultural education approach. It is inherently easier to show a new teacher how to teach her students to read several countries' versions of *Cinderella* showcasing other cultures through the familiar fairytale, or in February during Black History Month to highlight the strength of Rosa Parks as she refused to give up her seat on that Alabama bus.

This type of surface level or “foods and festivals” approach to culturally diverse teaching has been folded into the dominant narrative of U.S. schools as creating equity (Hammond, 2015). However, simply superimposing culture on the traditional curriculum has proven ineffective and does not uphold the tenets of anti-racist pedagogy (Hammond, 2015). As teachers dutifully teach the word “boycott” and “silent protest,” they neglect to answer the questions that students of color often ask: *Why did they do this to us?*

The obvious answer to the question is racism, but until last year, based on the dictionary definition, many could divorce themselves of the notion of being a racist. Prompted by the emails from a Missouri woman named Kennedy Mitchum, the Merriam-Webster online dictionary added a second definition to the word racism. The Associate Press (2020) reported that:

Prior to Mitchum’s emails, racism was defined as ‘a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race’.

With this definition, many could exclude themselves from the term by pointing to their inclusivity and public acknowledgments that no race is superior. However, the second definition now reads, “the systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), finally acknowledging the systemic

nature of racism. What I find most interesting, though, is that Merriam-Webster also included the following:

The lexicographer's role is to explain how words are (or have been) actually used, not how some may feel that they should be used, and they say nothing about the intrinsic nature of the thing named by a word, much less the significance it may have for individuals. When discussing concepts like racism, therefore, it is prudent to recognize that quoting from a dictionary is unlikely to either mollify or persuade the person with whom one is arguing.

I find the words on Merriam-Webster both simplistic and profound. We cannot rely on denotations because in its very nature, it is the connotation of the word racism that evokes emotion, and how we use language matters.

It is precisely the connotation of racism that teacher educators are interested in. What does racism mean to us, to our students, to our students' students? For White students and teachers, racism can evoke White guilt, or the recognition of how White privilege leads to the systemic racism and discrimination against culturally and linguistically diverse groups (Swim & Miller, 1999). White guilt is often used as a pedagogical tool and has been demonstrated to have a positive effect in shifting perspectives on racism and prejudice against minority groups (Estrada & Matthews, 2016; Swim & Miller, 1999). Studies indicate that higher levels of White guilt correlated to heightened awareness of White privilege and minority discrimination (Iyer et al., 2003; Swim & Miller, 1999). Estrada and Matthews's (2016) study revealed that when White college students were led to places of feeling guilty for actions such as "not speaking out against a racist joke," they may be encouraged to find places in their lives to enact change (p. 320).

However, there is a balance to be struck, and Estrada and Matthews (2016) also clarify the implications of pushing too far to the point of White shame, explaining that, "a student's sudden realization of having condoned racist jokes might bring to focus a perceived deficiency in assertiveness and other dispositional traits ... which can have counterproductive effects on student engagement and motivation" (p. 320). Estrada and Matthews (2016) continue to explain that "to temper a student's self-blame, an instructor might highlight the larger structural forces at play that ultimately orchestrate *everyone's* participation in a racist society" (p. 320). These studies point to the benefit of utilizing pedagogies that encourage explorations of White guilt to foster change in understandings

and beliefs about systemic racism. However, the use of a White guilt framework continues to center Whiteness in the conversation.

Others caution the reliance on either guilt or shame for positive change and encourage group-sympathy as an alternative which Iyer et al. (2003) described as “a more general predictor of support for different affirmative action policies” (p. 117). Iyer et al. question the ethical nature of utilizing frameworks of guilt specifically at the K-12 level and, as I have mentioned before, nearly half of U.S. states also feel the need to ban any teaching that could cause discomfort based on race (Ononye & Walker, 2021). This begs the question, should we encourage our K-12 pre- and in-service teachers to teach through a lens of White guilt and encourage their students to engage in conversations of White guilt? Is exploring White guilt simply perpetuating the centering of Whiteness? With current legislation banning CRT, are our pre- and in-service teachers even allowed to teach in a way that would create feelings of White guilt? These questions are not easily answered, but by combining anti-racist pedagogy with strategic empathy teacher educators may be able to more readily support students.

MOVING FORWARD: STRATEGIC EMPATHY AND ANTI-RACIST PEDAGOGY

For those of us who will continue to do this work, one option is to marry anti-racist pedagogy with a pedagogy of strategic empathy (Zembylas, 2012). Zembylas (2012) draws on his prior work on the *pedagogy of discomfort*, to suggest that by providing pre- and in-service teachers spaces to discuss their ever-fluctuating ideas, they are given time to adjust their discomfort to develop a self, which includes, learning from, and celebrating their diverse students (Zembylas, 2010). A pedagogy of strategic empathy asks educators “to examine under what circumstances discomforting learning may help teachers and students to engage in new affective relations with others” (Zembylas, 2012, p. 120) in order to live in a place of empathy that “recognizes the troubled knowledge one carries with him or her and accepts that this individual, just like anyone, possesses the same rights” (p. 121). Ultimately, we need to listen to each other’s stories and honor them in order to perpetuate change.

Similarly, in his group therapy work with South African Whiteness groups, Schmidt (2018) explained the purpose of the sessions were “to bring unconscious, socially transmitted beliefs and values into a collective

space ... [to] explore racialized experiences, biased beliefs, and unconscious attitudes and feelings that harm individuals and society” (p. 319). Many times, these spaces are deliberately racially or culturally separated at first to allow groups to reflect in homogenous spaces on long-held socially transmitted beliefs.

As with any shifts of belief, Zembylas (2012) cautions that without spending time to acknowledge the emotional implications of the groups involved any attempts at discussing inequities in history can backfire. Zembylas (2012) explains that

Pedagogies informed by critical theory have treated race and racism less as a complex affective experience than as a set of social and political issues to be addressed through systematic analysis. While critical theory in education has not entirely ignored emotions, attention to them has been insufficient. (p. 118)

It is through anti-racist pedagogy that we can do both: analyze systems of oppression and address emotions while consistently acknowledging how race interacts with both, specifically in the United States education system. Hammond (2015) writes that creating a safe space for students and taking the time to create a connection with students is not “just some touchy-feely performance. Rapport is based on neuroscience” (p. 78). Hammond further states that “our brains respond to negative experiences up to three times more than positive experiences” (p. 113) meaning that how we interact with our students directly affects their ability to learn. She challenges teachers to understand students through a socio-political context, recognizing implicit bias and structural racialization as influences on student learning (Hammond, 2015). Leung and López-McKnight (2020) explain that teachers must “provide affirmation to what students say and bring to the space, particularly students of Color, to validate their experience and knowledge ... [to] take the time for small interactions that humanize students” (p. 20), and this must be done at the college level by university professors as well.

Prior to making space for students, “it is necessary to offer a ‘brave space’ for [pre- and in-service teachers] to deeply self-reflect, to participate in dialogue, to deconstruct their own biases, to put their beliefs into disequilibrium, to reconcile tensions, etc.” (Medina, 2020, p. 121). When “brave spaces” are deliberately created, there can be self-reported shifts in beliefs. For example, pre-service teachers reported positive shifts in their

perceptions of immigrant students and immigration in general through working directly with immigrant students, reading ethnographies of personal stories, and watching documentaries about immigration (Kolano & King, 2015). By more deliberately crafting observation experiences and debriefing in the public school with the university instructor, pre-service teachers are given a more immediate “brave space” allowing for a deeper understanding of the teaching profession (Fitchett et al., 2018; Kolano & King, 2015).

While these experiences have merit, I want to take a moment to highlight the Whiteness of the teaching force again. Many of these conversations that are intent on mediating new beliefs through anti-racist pedagogy and CRT are happening with White pre-service teachers and being led by White faculty. In an essay to White teachers, Love (2019) writes of proposed requirements for pre-service teachers such as taking minority history classes, spending time in urban schools as part of fieldworks, and working specifically with Black and Brown students, but the crux of her argument centers again on this issue of humanity. Love (2019) writes,

But, at the end of the day, White teachers need to want to address how they contribute to structural racism. They need to join the fight for education justice, racial justice, housing justice, immigration justice, food justice, queer and trans justice, labor justice, and, above all, the fight for humanity. (para. 12)

Her voice is echoed by Kendi (2019) who described the moment the American public learned of the human genome project. Kendi wrote:

When scientists finished drawing the map of ‘our miraculous genetic code,’ when they stepped back and looked at the map, one of the ‘great truths’ they saw was ‘that in genetic terms, all humans, regardless of race, are more than 99.9 percent the same’. (p. 52)

This realization should have ended the “supposition that the biology of certain races yields superior behavioral traits, like intelligence” (Kendi, 2019, p. 53). It should have amplified the idea that, “The most important fact of life on the Earth is our common humanity” (Kendi, 2019, p. 52); however, for many, it did not.

Research in psychology may shed light on why the science of biology did not unite us. People are often more swayed to act on issues when

presented a personal story than factual evidence. This is known as the identifiable victim effect, an increase in empathy toward a situation when a personal story is shared (Jenni & Loewenstein, 1997). Personal experiences evoke an emotional response which, in turn, can increase a desire to enact change. Again, in my own work on teacher perceptions of immigration, pre-service teachers highlighted the documentaries *Which Way Home*, and *The New Americans* as giving them a new understanding of how difficult the immigration process is. Although we spent the entire semester discussing the history of immigration with detailed explanations of the systemic barriers, it took seeing personal stories to elicit empathy for immigrant experiences (Kolano & King, 2015). In essence, identifiable victim effect explains that humans often respond with more empathy to individual stories, making lived experiences more powerful than facts. As teacher educators, we can then encourage our students to see the patterns within these individual stories and open the door to discourse on difficult topics, such as systemic racism.

Discourse is a process that we cannot take lightly, and as educators we must ask ourselves what is our role in shifting paradigms and how can we use the science of empathy? Using emotional histories as a starting point, teacher educators can utilize *pedagogies of strategic empathy* to scaffold anti-racist education, to develop, “a mode of teaching and learning from troubled knowledge—a mode that produces a new ethical relationality and emotional culture in the classroom” (Zembylas, 2012, p. 123) which may be more complex than what many of us are currently doing.

Kishimoto (2018) explains that “anti-racist pedagogy is not about simply incorporating racial content into courses, curriculum, and discipline. It is also about how one teaches, even in courses where race is not the subject matter” (p. 540). For many, this is a new way of seeing the world, that at first, may seem divisive, uncomfortable or morally ambiguous, and this work begins with “faculty awareness and self-reflection of their social position ... not just in their teaching, but also in their discipline, research, and departmental, university, and community work” (Kishimoto, 2018, p. 540). When anti-racist pedagogy is enacted, it extends from the classroom into the greater societal structure of the university.

Continuing the Work

Enacting anti-racist pedagogy begins with five strategies as a starting point: (1) embrace critical pedagogy, (2) co-construct knowledge with our

students, (3) recognize White privilege, (4) resist ally performance or performative allyship—meaning doing anti-racist work for the perceptions of doing the work rather than the intention of making real change, and (5) take greater risks in the classroom (Phillips et al., 2019). Many of us in teacher education embrace these strategies daily but may have difficulty moving beyond the embrace. By relying more heavily on personal narratives, documentaries, ethnographies, and biographies, specifically of People of Color, as learning tools in teacher education, we can use these personal stories to highlight patterns and begin to co-construct knowledge around racism.

Additionally, teacher education programs can begin making more space for anti-racist conversations by utilizing already built-in fieldwork hours. Most pre-service teachers typically take a series of fieldwork hours beginning early in their teacher education program. Often, these fieldworks are observational in nature with pre-service teachers left with either a checklist of what to observe or a vague journal assignment (Fitchett et al., 2018). I suggest shifting the focus of fieldwork hours from simply observing to include time for Offices of Diversity to lead theory into practice discussions on anti-racist education. As discussed earlier in this chapter, simply a one-off lecture on diversity often leads to student silence, feelings of shame, or proclamations of “learning nothing new” (Kandaswamy, 2007). Teacher education programs should take the time to infuse consistent hours of observation with consistent hours of anti-racist work, led by qualified faculty instilling a pedagogy of strategic empathy. Most importantly, these hours should include multiple personal stories of People of Color through biographies, documentaries, and speakers, allowing pre- and in-service teachers to make shifts in their beliefs.

Additionally, I propose collaboration with clinical psychologists or therapists to envision how we can support work in seeking equity through healing group therapy (Schmidt, 2018). As Zembylas (2012) and Hammond (2015) stressed anti-racist work is more than conveying political ideas; it involves affective change. As teacher educators, we are skilled in creating safe spaces, but group therapy involves participants “sit[ting] with ambiguity and expand[ing] their understanding of a healing group experience as not just a calm, feel good event” (Asay et al., 2020, para. 6) which may be beyond the purview of teacher educators. Schmidt (2018) explained that his group “aimed to bring unconscious, socially transmitted beliefs and values into a collective space ... [in which to] explore racialized experiences, biased beliefs, and unconscious attitudes and feelings that

harm individuals and society” (p. 319). I argue that this work should not be done in the college classroom but in a new space, both physically and emotionally, in which to explore these beliefs. Using the classroom, a place typically reserved for academic work, brings with it its own narrative of grading, right and wrong answers, and understanding the assignment. Perhaps, moving this work to the realm of therapy is a more appropriate context to truly hear and reflect on the experiences of others.

CONCLUSION

As I have been writing this chapter, I have also begun a conversation with my own teacher education program and director of diversity to consider using early fieldworks and intentional spaces to engage in this critical analysis of what teachers are doing, what we want to do, and how to engage this through the lens of CRT and specifically anti-racist pedagogy. Although many of us in teacher education are already teaching from a perspective of critical theory and infusing our courses with elements of identity work, we are choosing to do more with intentionality. We are choosing to challenge our colleagues to move beyond neutrality and support the work of anti-racist educators. We have to commit to pushing for humanity to win by dismantling and reassigning power. We must continue the work that our colleagues began decades ago. We need to know that our words and actions have power, and that the Latino kids are not “ruining the school.”

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