CHAPTER 6

Implications of Shadeism on Teacher Perceptions and Practices: Racial Microaggressions in Schools

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Introduction

In my position as a high school English teacher, I assign my students a task of writing their own graphic novel which centres on a protagonist conceived of as a 'hero'. As part of their initial brainstorming activity, students are instructed to develop mind maps listing individuals, both real and fictional, that they believe represent what it means to be a 'hero'. Despite the majority of the students being negatively racialized bodies, the names they come up with are almost exclusively those of White people. I was both surprised and disappointed by this incident as I realized that students in 2017 still seem to associate qualities of goodness and heroism with Whiteness.

Internalized inferiority can be harboured by negatively racialized bodies regarding the perception of the self in relation to Whiteness. This negative perception is driven by the concept that the 'closer in proximity

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to Whiteness one is, whether this be measured by physical attributes such as lighter skin or straight hair, or social/ideological characteristics such as speech, religion, systems of beliefs, etc., the greater their access to White privilege' (Obeyesekere, 2017, p. 2). It is important to acknowledge that all social categorizations intersect informing and influencing each other, and as a result, none exist in isolation. This chapter will explore issues of racial microaggressions in Ontario, Canada high schools, particularly as they pertain to how racism and shadeism are enacted explicitly and implicitly through the hidden curriculum.

Microaggressions are 'brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of colour' (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). As a negatively racialized teacher myself, I am acutely aware of the effects of various forms of racial microaggression on both my negatively racialized students and colleagues. An American study focused on graduate student experiences noted, 'racial microaggressions are often perpetuated by well-intended peers, faculty, and supervisors at individual and institutional levels' (Hubain, Allen, Harris, & Linder, 2016, p. 947). Though 'well-intended', these microaggressions are implicit acts of racism that make 'many students of colour feel unwelcomed, invisible, and stigmatized on campuses, leading to experiences of isolation' (Hubain et al., 2016, p. 947).

Although discussion around microaggressions is often focused on race alone, such microaggressions are also based on other factors such as proximity to Whiteness and shadeism within negatively racialized groups. Shadeism refers to both interracial and intraracial discrimination based on skin tone. Shadeism or colourism; the ascribing of positive qualities to lighter skin (attractiveness, intellect, and aptitude), and negative qualities to darker skin (ugliness, unintelligence, and inability), continues to permeate many spaces (Herring, Keith, & Horton, 2004).

In the Canadian education system, 'the valorizing of lighter skin over darker skin is representative of negatively racialized students' desire to reproduce and reflect the dominant White culture' (Obeyesekere, 2017, p. 1). This false sense of inferiority has a tremendous impact on the self-esteem and self-worth of individuals. The hegemonic nature of the Eurocentric education system in Canada continues to perpetuate a structure where the closer in proximity to Whiteness a person is, the greater

their access to White privilege. There is insufficient anti-racism education in the secondary school system, particularly in recognizing shadeism and its impact on staff and students.

Although educational spaces, such as schools and classrooms, are often places where these ingrained beliefs and perceptions are displayed, these spaces can also act as sites of change and resistance. I believe that there must be a reimagining of schools in order for classrooms to become such sites of revolutionary change.

For the purposes of this article, I will explore the importance of skin tone, and its influence on teacher perception, beliefs, and actions in a heterogeneous, urban environment, and the consequent impact of this influence on students and colleagues. I will engage in a discussion of how shadeism is perpetuated in Ontario classrooms through the hidden curriculum. I will focus on the concept of identity in relation to the diasporic, negatively racialized urban teacher and student, and how shadeism informs their identity in terms of how they perceive themselves and how others perceive them as a result of colonization and White hegemony.

This article will be divided into two sections. In the first section, I will locate myself by examining my own experiences with shadeism, and establish its present day implications on teachers in Canadian schools. Through this analysis, I will attempt to resist the positivist paradigm that suggests that there is an objective way of knowing.

My objective is to offer analysis into the more nuanced aspects of racism and its impact on teachers and students, as well as to suggest integrative solutions to address this issue and create more inclusive classrooms. The second part of this article will conclude with thoughts on the implications of my findings and recommend strategies to address the consequences of various forms of microaggressions in schools. For the purposes of this article, my focus will be on how to improve teacher training in order to equip teachers with a sense of awareness and understanding of how to detect and reduce racial microaggressions towards students and colleagues. I argue that the same academic space should be given to the theorizing of race (and its complexity) as is given to such subjects as biology, chemistry, English, math, etc. Further, I assert that this space can only be created if teachers work to recognize and challenge their inherent biases.

The Enduring Effects of Shadeism and the Hidden Curriculum

Through the Gaze of Ms. Obeyesekere: Locating the Self

I am engaging in shadeism from my position as a South Asian/cisgendered/hetero/middle-class/woman living in the global North. As such, I am approaching the issue of shadeism particularly as it pertains to teachers and students in an urban environment, from my experiences in two very distinct metropolises, Toronto, Canada and Colombo, Sri Lanka. John Dewey (1938) speaks of experiences in this profound way,

> If an experience arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and proposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future, continuity works in a very different way. Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into. (p. 38)

How then, do our past and present experiences inform our future actions and beliefs? In attempting to theorize my experiences in my previous work, I have addressed almost exclusively my childhood and adolescence. As much as shadeism has integrally affected my formative years, I often overlook its manifestation in adulthood. As I set out to collect and organize field notes pertaining to shadeism's effect on the experiences and identities of my students, I realized that I must address its internalization in their teachers—my colleagues—both negatively racialized and dominant. I noted countless instances of internalization of microaggressions from students regarding how shadeism influences whom they deem attractive, intelligent, desirable, or how it informs their actions, for example, their aversion to going out into the sun for fire drills. Nevertheless, it was only in acknowledging similar sentiments in their teachers that I recognized the challenges in expecting students to theorize and attempt to transcend race and racism while their teachers, despite their own best efforts are yet to, or unable to do so.

Notable is a recent encounter I had with a colleague I teach closely alongside, at an Alternative High School in Mississauga, Ontario. Joe,[1] a White middle-aged man, openly suggested that I date another colleague, Kwame. When I displayed discomfort at the suggestion and communicated that I was not interested, he asked, 'is it because he is Black?' My immediate impulse was to refute this, in an attempt to propel myself

closer to 'my kind', in this case, our negatively racialized colleague. This desire, which Fanon (1986) calls 'ethical orientation', outlines the polarized elements of servitude or conquest. For Fanon, real love requires 'the mobilization of psychological agencies liberated from unconscious tensions' (Fanon, p. 24). In that moment, to communicate my lack of romantic interest in Kwame required a conscious separation of my feeling of disinterest, from race. My need to prove my solidarity with other negatively racialized bodies persisted as Joe pressed for further information, asking, 'have you ever dated a Black guy before?' I immediately reminded him that my last long-term and fairly significant relationship was with a Black man, almost pleased that I could dismiss the allegation of prejudice that I felt he was placing on me. Yet, just as quickly, he retorted, 'no I mean really Black. Peter, isn't really Black, he is so light-skinned'. This belief that the lighter pigment of my ex-partner removed him from his Blackness and brought him closer in proximity to Whiteness, despite both his parents being Black, called me to critical self-reflection. These racial microaggressions are examples of how well-intended efforts to connect socially with me by my colleagues led to feelings of isolation and 'othering'.

I had heard similar sentiments in the past, but mostly from other negatively racialized people. I believed these White hegemonic ideals were a direct result of internalized inferiority felt by many negatively racialized bodies, completely overlooking their effect on dominant bodies. In this space, my professional space, an educational space, I necessarily wondered how these ingrained beliefs held by White bodies—teachers, administrators, and support staff—can lead to microaggressions in their interactions with negatively racialized students and colleagues. The polarizing effect of race has unarguably created debilitating conflict and tension, 'the juxtaposition of the black and white races has resulted in a massive psycho-existential complex. By analysing it we aim to destroy it' (Fanon, xvi). I believe we must destroy it in order to shatter the servant-conqueror binary, in order to achieve freedom of mind and heart for ourselves as educators as well as for our students.

Teacher Perceptions of Shadeism: Enforcement of the Hidden Curriculum

The servant-conqueror binary is manifested in racial microaggressions, which are enacted through the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum in this context refers to 'the unintended outcomes of the schooling

process' (McLaren, 1989, p. 212). In my experience both as a student and a teacher in Ontario's school system, these 'instructional norms and values not openly acknowledged by teachers or school officials' consequently 'other' and exclude negatively racialized bodies (Vang, 2006, p. 20). The curriculum as it is presented continues to preserve Eurocentric hegemony through the normalization of Whiteness. This is witnessed in the constant normalization of Whiteness explicit in the narrative that students are bombarded with in textbooks and lessons. As a friend's son proclaimed after science class, 'it seems that anyone who has ever invented anything is White' Thus, not only does Whiteness dominate the curriculum, the omission and silencing of issues of race and shadeism by not addressing such concepts in schools, serves as a microaggression itself and reinforces White hegemony.

David Knight (2015), a teacher himself, looks at multiple studies based in New York and California in his research around the effect of shadeism on the perceptions and attitudes of American teachers. Knight found that generally, students are aware that their teachers treat them differently because of their skin colour. Knight (2015) notes the observation of another teacher, an Asian American from Sacramento, California who reported, 'students say that the afterschool teachers, who happen to be black, prefer the lighter-skinned students, which is funny because some of our strongest students are dark-skinned' (p. 48). A New York University study conducted on Latino high school males found that Mexican and Puerto Rican students with 'white-looking' skin are often perceived as White and as a result are treated better in school, while those of the same ethnicity with darker skin are perceived as Black and are treated less favourably (Knight, 2015, p. 46). A University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) study reports that teachers with unchecked implicit biases are likely to interpret student behaviour and performance through the prism of stereotypes, and this can have long-term effects on how students see themselves and on their opportunities (Knight, 2015). The results of these studies show a correlation between lighter skin and better treatment in school. This research is consistent with my experience teaching in Ontario high schools. My students have consistently communicated an aversion to darker skin, correlating attractiveness and intelligence to light skin, and feelings that teacher expectations favour those with lighter skin. This evidence furthers the notion that the hidden curriculum reinforces White hegemonic ideal, by rewarding proximity to Whiteness.

The UCLA study cited by Knight (2015) found that educators often cannot perceive their own biases. They frequently assume that they do not carry bias because they chose to enter a profession of 'helping others' (p. 47). The idea that teachers may not believe they hold such biases, or if they do, fail to acknowledge that these biases may affect their interactions with their colleagues and students, became clear to me through an encounter I had with another White male colleague a few weeks ago. During a lunchtime conversation in the staffroom, Jeff stated that though he found racialized women 'exotic' and 'attractive', he is not attracted to them if they are 'too dark'. He went on to say that people in general, with very black skin look alarming or 'creepy' to him and he often finds this off-putting.

As I replayed this conversation in mind, I wondered how this bias towards lighter skin, though communicated in the personal context, might inform Jeff's relationships and interactions in the professional sense—with students and colleagues. Do darker students and colleagues frighten him on some level? How does this internalized fear of the 'other' affect Jeff's connections, communications, and expectations of negatively racialized bodies in the school environment? Though Jeff did not share his 'preference' with malice or ill-intent, I was uncomfortable with this microaggression towards negatively racialized bodies. This experience made me feel 'othered' and exoticsized and I pondered the impact of Jeff's perspective on other negatively racialized bodies in the school. Jeff's feelings work to perpetuate the idea that all things good are White. Therefore, the closer you are to Whiteness the more likely you will be to achieve, be accepted, and succeed, according to the existing conventions already engrained into Euro-normative pedagogy.

According to Portelli (1993), 'the hidden curriculum is usually contrasted with the formal curriculum and may form part of the actual curriculum' (p. 343). Thus, applied to the nuances of race and Whiteness, the dominant White hegemonic narrative is continuously created and recreated and as a result becomes the essence of the curriculum that is taught to all students, whether dominant or marginalized. However, it reflects the stories, experiences, understandings, and beliefs of a few, without ever addressing the omissions or experiences of the oppressed—in this case, negatively racialized students and staff. Portelli argues two major points '(1) that the hidden curriculum always has a normative or "moral" component', in this case, White Euro-normativity, and (2) all things being equal, educators have the responsibility to make the hidden curriculum

as explicit as possible (p. 343). I echo Portelli's sentiment in this regard, as I believe that we must create the same academic space for theorizing, teaching, and learning about race and racism as we do for any other subject. Once we as teachers and educators openly acknowledge that the curriculum as it is presented continues to preserve Eurocentric hegemony through the normalization of Whiteness (in textbooks, lessons, etc.), we can create a foundation and forum where negatively racialized students and professionals can deconstruct, articulate, and share their own experiences and beliefs. These counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) act as a form of resistance to the dominant narrative and serve to combat internalization of microaggressions. This call for the explicit acknowledgment of the hidden curriculum is the first step in dismantling Euro-normativity through the establishment of schools as sites of change.

Implications and Recommendations of Work

Addressing Shadeism in Urban Schools: Teaching Teachers

> School serves as an effective creator and sustainer of social myth because of its structure as a ritual game of graded promotions. Introduction into this gambling ritual is much more important than what or how something is taught. It is the game itself that schools, that gets into the blood and becomes a habit. A whole society is initiated into the Myth of Unending Consumption of services. (Illich, 1970, p. 44)

This sentiment articulated by Illich as justification for his notion of 'deschooling', is especially relevant in the consideration of race, in Ontario schools. Schools, classrooms, all educational spaces, have the potential to be sites of decolonization and change. Our classrooms are calling for a shift, a re-centring. In order to change the dominant Eurocentric narrative, those who govern educational spaces must hold themselves accountable. Teachers, administrators, and support staff must tap into their ability to address and acknowledge difference in order to affect change. Removing the expectation from student productivity and performance, to refocus on teacher growth, is an especially crucial point of interrogation for me as I engage in the creation and implementation of a Professional Development (PD) initiative around anti-racism for teachers within the school board for which I work.

According to what Freire (1970) calls the 'banking method', students are turned into 'containers' or 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher (p. 72). This notion is consistent with the reinforcement of Euro-normativity throughout the curriculum. Students are offered one narrative, the dominant White narrative, which is deposited into their brains by teachers. Freire further postulates that the more (information) a teacher is able to deposit the better teacher they are, in this case, the perpetuating of White supremacy through the curriculum, and the more a student is able to process and internalize, the better student they are. Thus, success in school for negatively racialized students necessarily means the internalization of European ideals, which manifests into internalized and externalized feelings of inferiority and a disconnection from the curriculum, and school.

Fanon (1986) describes the Eurocentric schooling of negatively racialized bodies during the years he calls, 'the period of most vulnerable formation', as an experience of 'traumatism' (p. 127). According to Fanon, during their schooling years, children are taught White superiority so that they internalize it. This fragments their being as they quickly come to understand themselves as inferior (p. 126). Similarly, mandating teaching this Eurocentric curriculum positions negatively racialized teachers as inferior as their Indigenous knowledges are undervalued. Fanon further posits that 'the individual who *climbs up* into, white, civilized society tends to reject his black, uncivilized family…' (p. 128). Thus, for negatively racialized bodies, to succeed school requires the internalization of someone else's story at the expense of the erasure or rejection of their own.

I believe that teacher training focused on the valuing of multiple ways of knowing can offset these feelings of inferiority projected onto negatively racialized bodies. Though the immanent platform for the development of these strategies will be the PD workshop that I am developing for my school board, my hope is that the explicit teaching of race and racism will become a ubiquitous aspect of both initial teacher training and professional development for experienced teachers.

The proposed PD workshop will be divided into three sections:

i. Acknowledging privileges and oppressions
ii. Centring an understanding of teacher and student identity and experience
iii. Language as a tool or tribulation

i. Acknowledging Privileges and Oppressions

In order for teachers to acknowledge the diverse positions and experiences of their students, they must first situate their own identities informed by the various privileges and oppressions attached to their bodies. As Cannon (2012) posits in relation to pre-service education for teacher candidates, 'no one is free from being an oppressor or being oppressed' (p. 26). Teachers must recognize and accept the myth of meritocracy in that the privileges attached to certain (dominant) bodies and not others allot the former more opportunities. As outlined by Ghabrial (2012), the term 'meritocracy' entered in the late-twentieth century as a counter to 'affirmative action' (p. 38). The acknowledgment of privilege for the dominant threatens their perceived 'right' to what they have, the notion that their successes—academic, economic, and societal—have been earned.

I encountered an example of this White fragility during a recent conversation with the Student Success Teacher assigned to my class. As a White woman working with a majority of negatively racialized students in the alternative education setting, Susan's role often leads her to have heart-to-heart conversations with students around how their identities inform their circumstances. Despite this frequent and intimate exposure to student experiences of oppression, during a personal conversation about her son, Susan demonstrated how the '"construction of white racial identities" has socialized whites to conceptualize their world in ways that favor their positions within it' (Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005, p. 147).

Susan's son Christopher had recently begun his first year of Engineering Studies at the University of Toronto. In a discussion about the humanities breadth requirement mandated for all engineering students, Susan refuted the idea that Christopher was privileged, both in the particular instance of the course, and in the general navigation of the program, in comparison to the rest of his group members, all foreign students from China. Not only did Susan defensively stress Christopher's 'exceptionality' and 'intelligence', she went on to claim that the Chinese students in fact had an easier time as the programme was so saturated with them, it had become more, 'Asian than Canadian'. She insisted that Christopher had to forgo his previously 'well-balanced' lifestyle in order to 'study like the Asians'. Susan went on to cite an example of a professor addressing students in Mandarin as evidence of what Ghabrial (2012) calls 'Yellow Peril' (p. 46). The term refers to the fear from

dominant bodies that Asian students' 'single-minded' approach to university focused only on academics threatens the vitality of campuses, thus 'turning off white potential applicants or else "stealing" their futures' (Ghabrial, 2012, p. 46).

Susan voiced this fear by affirming what Ghabrial reports is the critique of the 'University of Toronto for its "too Asian" reputation: a place where white students feel they cannot balance their studies with socialization' (p. 46). This experience was especially saddening for me, not only because Susan refused to acknowledge that, as Peggy McIntosh (1990) believes, 'white privilege put [her] at an advantage' but further that she projected blame and 'othered' Asian students as being a barrier to her son engaging in a full and happy undergraduate experience (p. 1).

According to McIntosh, 'whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege' (p. 1). As evident by my experience with Susan, who I believe genuinely cares about the success and well-being of our students, it is clear that any threat to their own White privilege alarms even the most well-intended, sympathetic dominant body. Susan's claim that her own son is disadvantaged serves as a 'microinvalidation', whereby she is nullifying the 'psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color' (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274) and denying the existence of barriers facing negatively racialized bodies. Acknowledging White privilege threatens the very idea of meritocracy that works to preserve dominant bodies' sense of self-worth and value, their 'right' to be who they are and have what they have without ever questioning at whose expense.

Recognizing the crucial importance of acknowledging privilege, my recommendation is that the first step of a PD around anti-racism should begin with a *Privilege Walk*. Similar to Martin Cannon's (2012) pseudo-identity exercise whereby teacher candidates are 'assigned a pseudo identity, based on religious, ethnic, colonial, gender, sexual, social class, and ability differences', I want to encourage participants to 'realize that privilege and oppression varies according to context and/or circumstances—mediating our everyday experience of racism' (p. 26). My intention is to have teachers recognize their own, actualized privileges and oppressions by simply walking in a straight line. Teachers should be asked to take steps backward (to indicate oppressions attached to their bodies) and forward (to indicate privileges attached to their bodies), by the end of the exercise, teachers should be aware of their own positionality based on where they are physically standing in relation to others in the room.

For teachers to understand and believe that negatively racialized peoples are placed outside the 'norm' and that this is reinforced through the school system is crucial to their vital role in establishing schools as sites of change. Ideally, more of our classrooms should have teachers at the front who reflect the experiences of the students they teach. They should look like them, sound like them, and understand them. As we move towards this goal, we can only hope that the teachers who are presently at the front of the classroom strive for an understanding of their students and colleagues by first acknowledging their own positionality in the academic space.

ii. Centring an Understanding of Teacher and Student Identity and Experience

Once teachers have situated themselves, they are better positioned to contextualize the developing identities and experiences of their students and colleagues. As Dewey (1938) states,

> [t]he greater maturity of experience which should belong to the adult as educator puts him in a position to evaluate each experience of the young in a way in which the one having the less mature experience cannot do. It is then the business of the educator to see in what direction the experience is heading. (p. 38)

Dewey's words are especially applicable in the context of race and shadeism as they pertain to student experience and identity. Though teachers may not share the experiences and positionality of their students, they do have a responsibility to assist them in the contextualizing of these experiences. It is the role of teachers to explicitly discuss race and racism in the classroom and create an environment in which students not only feel safe but also feel encouraged to share and theorize their experiences of oppression based on skin colour. In doing so, students are better able to unpack their internalized and externalized feelings of inferiority rooted in White supremacy.

Important to note is that student experiences do not 'occur in a vacuum' (Dewey, p. 40). Dewey (1938) acknowledges the 'sources outside of an individual which give rise to experience', in this case, the experiences of negatively racialized students, which inform their identity and positionality in school are attributed to aspects of their identity that are outside of their control (p. 40). The colour of their skin is one element of their identity that places them outside of this 'norm'.

Centring the experiences of negatively racialized teachers and students will be a vital element of the proposed anti-racism PD. Allowing negatively racialized teachers to teach from their own unique perspective informed by cultural knowledges works to decolonize schools by opening dialogue for all students to share their own positionality and experiences. This works to combat racial microaggressions by creating a safe space for counter-narratives to be shared and learned.

I suggest that teachers be presented with testimonials written by students within the school board reflecting their experiences with race/racism/shadeism throughout their schooling careers. Teachers will be placed in small groups to explore one testimonial and discuss the issues, which arose from the student feedback, any feelings about the findings they may have, as well as potential ways they feel the issues could be addressed in their classrooms. This exercise should then be debriefed in the larger group context in order to give facilitators the opportunity to contribute formal, theoretical recommendations in the form of lessons, workshops, and reflection assignments that teachers may work through in their own classrooms. However, it is important to acknowledge that this strategy should not be understood or read as being dependent on empathy, but rather one that seeks to elicit structural changes in how teacher education is delivered. The intention of centring the experiences and identities of negatively racialized students through testimonial case studies is to combat the resistance often communicated by teachers that they, 'won't have time to teach everything else and multicultural education, too' and that, 'there's nothing multicultural about algebra, biology, geography, chemistry, calculus, or computer science' (Gay & Howard, 2000, p. 4). Teachers need to be made aware or simply be reminded of the fact that the colour of their skin is a demarcation that students carry from class to class. Skin colour has consequences on how a student is perceived and how they process the curriculum being delivered to them, regardless of the subject.

iii. Language as a Tool or Tribulation

As Dei (2000) emphasizes the colour of our skin is the one element of our identity that is impossible to mask or transcend. Thus, in their attempt to vie for Whiteness and all the privilege associated with it, negatively racialized bodies have been forced to engage in other methods to achieve proximity to the dominant. Historically, as evident in the privileging of the *métissage,* a social group made up of the children of White

colonialists and Black and Indigenous people in North America, material advantages were given to those with lighter skin (Lane & Mahdi, 2013). The result was the fragmentation of negatively racialized bodies from each other. An environment was created in which there was little or no little solidarity between racialized communities as they were vying for proximity to Whiteness. Consequently, racialized people often do not think outside of this system, but rather attempt to get as close as possible to Whiteness. This is evident in the valuing of 'standard English' over colloquial or local dialects.

According to Christensen (1990), there is a 'bias against those who do not use language "correctly"' (p. 36). She critiques the denotations of 'Standard English' and 'nonstandard English' reflecting, quite correctly that the labels suggest that one is 'less than' (p. 36). Christensen goes on to note, 'English teachers are urged to "correct" students who speak or write in their home language' (p. 36). Growing up speaking only Standard English, it was not until I was an adult that I realized the racial and cultural capital I acquired by doing so. However, though my Canadian accent and language style allowed me to navigate my educational and professional spaces somewhat easily, this came at the direct expense of my Sri Lankan identity. The erasure of my identity was evident throughout my teenage years, not only in the fact that I could not communicate in my native language of Sinhala, in Sri Lanka but also in the distancing that I felt among the Sri Lankan community in Canada. I felt 'othered' by my diasporic community, as I was not able to fully understand many of the nuances of language and local colloquialisms used by other Sri Lankan teens in Toronto. According to Fanon (1986), 'the more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets—i.e., the closer he becomes to being a true human being' (p. 2). In my teenage experience, the racial and cultural capital I accrued by speaking Standard English, through currying favour with teachers or success in job interviews over other negatively racialized peers, became a source of pain as I felt a distancing from my peer group to whom I wished to belong.

I attempted to problematize this emphasis on Standard English and the consequent erasure of identity during a PD session that I recently attended. The after-school PD was meant to be about language disability, however, there was an alarming focus on a term coined '*Teenage Language Disorder*'. The interpretation of this supposed disorder by the presenter, a White female teacher seconded to the board (who has been

out of the classroom for over a decade), seemed to indicate that urban colloquialisms such as slang, up-speak, vocal fry, etc., were elements of student language that needed to be 'unlearned'. When I suggested that perhaps there should be some onus on us as teachers to make an effort to understand some of the language commonly used by our students, and even create a platform for them to speak and write in this language in order to engage their 'authentic selves', I was shut down from every angle. Teachers were emphatically proclaiming the 'disservice we are doing to our students by not teaching them how "we" speak "here"', and 'if "they" want to come to this country "they" should do things the way "we" do things here'. One colleague referenced his previous career in the private sector, mentioning that when he did business in Asia, he had to 'conform to the etiquette and language conventions of the East', and similarly, the 'students should conform to the etiquette and language conventions of the West if they want to "succeed"'. I reminded him that as an infant settler nation, the question of what Canada is and thus, what her conventions are, remain very contentious and uncertain points of debate.

Enforcing these standards of English puts pressure on negatively racialized teachers to speak, and establish the expectation that students speak using Standard English in order to be validated in school though they may not feel comfortable doing so. A Jamaican teacher with whom I worked was viewed as being 'unrefined' for speaking with her students in Patois. Colleagues told her that by attempting to connect with her students through language that is native to them, she was inappropriately 'befriending' them. This is an example of a microaggression that 'others' both the teacher and her students, positioning their language and culture as inferior.

My own conclusion from the above-mentioned experiences is that language and race are points of intersection that cannot be separated just as skin colour and race cannot be separated. In order for teachers to fully acknowledge the identities and experiences of their negatively racialized students, they must create a space for their language in the classroom. They must afford the authentic voices of their staff and students, value, and validity. This will be the third element of the proposed PD. Teachers will problematize the notion of language through a self-reflective critique of their own understanding and perception of language. They will be asked to question why they value certain modes of communication over others, and what they feel the implications of these beliefs are on

their students and colleagues. In order for classrooms to truly be sites of social and political change, those who govern schools, as though each is its own autonomous nation, must critique the very concept of nationhood itself, so that its citizens, their diverse group of staff and students, may have the hope of freedom and love, where their voices are valued and their experiences cherished.

Conclusion

The revolutionary change that can take place in the classroom must take the form of what Boler (2004) calls 'critical hope', this hope, this desire, 'recognizes that we live within systems of inequality, in which privileges, such as White and male privilege comes at the expense of the freedom of others' (p. 128). The White European narrative normalized by Canadian schooling through both the explicit and hidden curriculums works to oppress negatively racialized students and teachers by perpetuating White supremacy established during colonization. In order to liberate negatively racialized bodies from this mental and emotional incarceration, teachers must mobilize themselves as agents of revolutionary change. Teachers cannot afford to espouse such sentiments as 'There are too many cultures and ethnic groups and I don't know enough to teach them all'; or fear 'inadvertently saying something stupid or hurtful and embarrassing themselves or offending people from other ethnic groups' (Gay & Howard, 2000, p. 4). We have a responsibility to attempt to shift the dominant narrative, to question it, and to challenge it, 'for apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human' (Freire, 1970, p. 72).

If as Dei (2013) suggests, schools can act as sites of change, what better place is there to engage in discourse around shadeism? My hope is that through critical anti-racist work in schools, the effects of shadeism can be dismantled and a culture of awareness created in its place. By situating shadeism through deconstructing its colonial roots and examining its implications today, the call to decenter Whiteness is clear. The saliencies of race and skin colour indicate that there is no objective way of knowing. Negatively racialized bodies, moving through space and time, each experience the consequences of their skin colour differently.

Schools must be sites of hope and change rather than sites of oppression. The discussion of teacher training in this article outlines three elements—acknowledging privileges and oppressions, centring an understanding

of student and teacher identity and experience, and language as a tool or tribulation—as fundamental components of creating anti-racist classrooms. By expanding the dialogue about race and racial microaggressions in schools, my aim is to create an academic space that values the experiences and knowledges of negatively racialized students and teachers. This is part of the process of decolonizing education necessary to create an authentically equitable learning and working environment in Ontario's schools.

In this supposedly postcolonial world, people are still bombarded with images, advertisements, music, and textbooks that continue to valorize Whiteness. It is imperative that they recognize the many ways in which racism is enacted in order to understand the false perceptions and consequences ascribed to negatively racialized bodies and actively resist them.

Note

1. All names from personal examples and anecdotes used in this article have been replaced with pseudonyms.

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