

REFRAMING: SUSAN A. TILLEY & KELLY D. POWICK (2014)

A long time has passed since we wrote our chapter addressing issues of racial identity and White privilege in educational contexts. Susan used the text when working with three different groups of 12 elementary teachers enrolled in an ETFO sponsored 6-week Professional Learning Community entitled *Working across difference: Understanding identity, Whiteness, and critical pedagogy*. The chapters the groups read and discussed provided a vehicle for participants to make personal connections to the issues and experiences the authors explored in their chapters. Individuals were reading the text as they continued to teach so were often able to make theory/practice connections. The teachers indicated a desire to better understand how Eurocentrism and structural Whiteness affected their pedagogical and curricular decisions. Susan also used chapters in the book in her university teaching as a way to draw her students in to critical conversations.

At the time of writing the chapter, Kelly was teaching courses on cross-cultural communications to predominately White (adult) students and questioning how to encourage the students to engage in conversations related to race, culture, and White privilege and to take into account and respect individual and group differences. Since the chapter, her teaching responsibilities and her conversations have shifted dramatically. Presently teaching English to international students, she recognizes that the conversations she is having around race and racial identity are fewer and have moved out of the classroom and, are instead, taking place in the staffroom. Perhaps not surprising, most talks with her fellow teachers center around the sharing of effective teaching practices with respect to the diverse nature of the student population. Despite teachers' good intentions, these talks often take the form of how to help "those" students to better fit into "our" educational institutions. Three of Kelly's colleagues have read chapters from the *Great White North*. In discussions they have used what they have understood from the text to push beyond perceptions of international students as the *Other* to begin considering their own identities (racial and otherwise) and, in particular, how an individual's personal and professional identities intersect and shape each another.

Our more recent experiences addressing issues related to racial identity and White privilege have not been much different than what we described in our chapter. After teaching the course additional times, Susan repeated a similar process of data collection only to discover after analysis that findings reflected the first round of data. Teachers in the course described the normalizing of colour-blind perspectives, the structures in place to support Eurocentrism and White privilege, and the continued overriding and powerful influence of neo-liberal and dominant ideology. Again, individuals struggled with difficult knowledge the course explored, and we expect,

as one of the earlier interview participants expressed, their heads often hurt at the end of a class. What has been hopeful in Susan's case is the number of graduate students who have indicated a desire to learn more about institutional Whiteness and the role the institutional structures and their identities, White or racialized, affect their pedagogical and curriculum decisions.

The student demographics in Kelly's current teaching context are changing. According to the Association of Universities and Colleges Canada (2012), the enrollment of international students in Canadian universities increased 12 percent in 2012, and approximately 110,000 students from foreign countries are currently attending Canadian universities. In response to the shifting educational landscape, several departments in her institution met to invite conversation around diversity topics. The us/them dynamic discussed in our chapter was exemplified by a panel of international students formed to encourage the predominately White teaching staff ("us") to ask non-White students ("them") questions about teaching practices and classroom styles in their home countries. The questions seemed to be based in a belief that classrooms would operate more smoothly if educators and educational institutions could simply better "manage" the diversity in their classrooms.

When re-reading our chapter for this reframing task, Kelly was drawn to Question #5 in the reflection section, which asks how individuals can work against the silencing of discussions around race and racialized identity. This was an uncomfortable question for her to contemplate. Participants in our original study repeatedly acknowledged their reluctance to talk with others about such things. In thinking about her current teaching context, Kelly has come to recognize that despite having a degree of foundational understanding of these ideas and an awareness of the need for such conversations, she has, too often, also remained silent.

Moving forward to write a current companion piece, we would complicate our understandings of the discourse on Whiteness to a greater degree. We understand better now that this is far from an uncomplicated discourse. We would highlight more comprehensively, the intricacies of the intersections across race, class, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and culture. We also understand that in the Canadian context where the majority of teachers are White, middle-class women we need to find ways for them to continue their education so that they are knowledgeable enough to work respectfully across difference, remembering as they do, that they are not an isolated entity in their classrooms but part of the diversity present. While trying to reframe our discussion in light of the passing years, we concluded that not enough has changed and dissatisfaction with our progress continues.

In the Canadian context there is a push to reach out globally to create partnerships in educational initiatives that take various shapes. Universities are creating research opportunities for faculties and international study opportunities for students. We are crossing global borders in a variety of ways often without enough preparation. It is worrisome to think that many dominant perspectives applied daily to issues of racial identity and White privilege in the Canadian context will travel overseas as global

collaborations continue to develop. Our chapter and other chapters in the *Great White North* are useful in supporting the development of a critique of structural Whiteness in the Canadian context. The text can serve as a starting point for those of us who will connect with international educational partners to build our knowledge but also, for those of us like Kelly who work with international students studying in this country.

REFERENCE

Association of Universities and Colleges Canada. (2012). *New university enrolment figures show increases in international, grad students*. Ottawa, ON: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.aucc.ca/media-room/news-and-commentary/new-university-enrolment-figures-show-increases-in-international-grad-students-2>