Can the Empire's Tools Ever Dismantle the Empire's House? Teacher Education and the Practice of Identifications

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Abstract

In this paper 1 have analyzed discourses in preservice education classrooms. The analysis is done in order to examine the complexities faced by professors who attempt to move away from using prescribed ethnic categories of identifications in their teaching. 1 argue that the struggle to assert one's identity as fluid and as drawn from multiple and changing social practices and desires is complex and often futile discourse. The classroom discourses of preservice students whose prior knowledge and experiences are congruent with practices facilitating marginality and white supremacy are most likely to marginalize progressive educators in general and people of colour in particular.

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL GROUNDING

> We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us (Lorde, 1984, p. 44).

Binary opposites as analytical tools have been successfully challenged in academic scholarship. Academically, it is recognized that issues carmot be spoken about as simply good or bad, black or white, east or west, etc. for such division is precarious at best, its epistemological validity seriously open to question!. Similarly, the academic world has sanctioned that the use of categories in attempts to identify individuals and groups creates conceptual difficulty. Identity is now regarded as fluid and incomplete, a production that is always in process. In this vain there seems to exist an agreement that referring to people as simply black or white, man or woman, gay or heterosexual, limits and undermines the multiplicity of subjectivity. In addition, the use of concepts such as race, ethnicity and culture as valid analytical concepts has been greatly debated in academic scholarship.

Yet, however debated, challenged and sometimes destabilized, individuals continue to use these terms in everyday practices to make sense of who they are, to position themselves culturally and politically within society, and to position others.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the way categories of identification continue to be used in interpersonal politics, that is, in the negotiation of relations of power by individuals in interaction. In particular, I am interested in the use of these categories in teaching and learning about issues of social and cultural differences. I write this paper as an African-Canadian woman working with preservice teachers in a predominantly white teacher education program. This work is part of my ongoing efforts to assist students in the *social and cultural differences* class I teach each year, to construct and analyze questions about difference through the use of biographic and other kinds of writing as part of their learning process.

The nature of the course I want to focus on, *social and cultural differences,* necessitates the examination of "isms" that are part of everyday practices in constructing differences between individuals in interaction. Race and racism, culture and class are, but a few concepts that form the basis for examination in this class. While concepts such as culture and class have proved to be somewhat trouble-free and painless, over the years of teaching this course to different groups of students, I have observed that race and racism are more difficult if not multifaceted topics of analysis.

Over the past two decades, literature documenting difficulties in and reasons for the difficulties in teaching about race and racism has emerged. Phoenix (1997) traces these difficulties to the historic practice where studies on race and ethnicity tended to focus on black people and other minority groups. Accordingly, this practice resulted in the racialization of black and other minority groups and to the construction of white people as the norm. Over the past few decades though, interesting work has emerged that examines the social construction of "whiteness" , arguing that attempts toward understanding race and racism require a focus on both black and white experiences (see, for example, hooks, 1992; Troyna & Hatcher, 1992). Despite these studies, and despite the realization that race and racism are part and parcel of the lives of white people, a lot of energy still needs to be directed towards making possible the conversations and courses that speak directly to racism and "whiteness" alike. This is more so because in courses where race and racism are examined conversational problems are dominant.

Referencing numerous scholars, Phoenix (1997), argues that conversational and conceptual difficulties exist because of lack of recognition of historical power relations between black and white people; a denial of power emanating from a refusal by whites to be positioned as beneficiaries of historic injustices such as the slave trade; and because of a general failure by the dominant to reflect

on dominance.

Fine (1997) locates the difficulties in teaching about race and racism in the makeup of academic institutions arguing that institutions create and enforce racial meanings through, to borrow from Bourdieu (1977), symbolic domination. That is, institutions create and enforce racial meaning through making discriminating practices appear normal and neutral. Fine offers an example of high school tracking of students into "advanced" and "standard" classes, a practice that, on the surface, appears to be race-neutral since students are given a "choice". However, Fine argues that in the schools she investigated, students were socialized to the point where they "chose" their "place" with the white students in "advanced" and the black students in "standard" classes. Subsequently, this neutral-appearing policy acts to re/produce whiteness "through the exclusion and denial of opportunity of people colour" (1997, p. 60) and in this way works to ensure white privilege.

Similarly, Cook (1997) states that in teaching about and investigating race and racism difficulties exist because of institutional demographics that create an environment of whiteness and result in a discourse of white privilege. Looking at the lives of black women in the academy, Cook states that the university has created a situation where white value systems govern, leading to a practice of, for instance, subjective criteria of evaluating performances. She states, "there are still many who either genuinely believe that the White way is the only way that academia should be structured, or they believe that since they were tenured by these standards that others must also endure it... Academia is a very elite profession, signifying intellectual prowess and selectivity; it may be difficult for many Whites to perceive Blacks as worthy of such designations and privileged lifestyles" (p. 108).

Among other scholars, Monture-Angus (1995) discusses racism and white privilege in Canadian Universities especially as it affects Aboriginal students and professors. Drawing on her experiences as a law student and later a professor of law Monture-Angus discusses how, through alienation and isolation, minority students and professors are subordinated and white privilege maintained. In the chapter "Surviving the contradictions in Academia", she outlines the different struggles she faces, struggles that could also be extended to analyze other minority women's experiences in teaching about diversity and difference. The first set of struggles relates to the manner in which white students, because of who these women are, (and in her case, a Mohawk woman), challenge their authority. Another set has to do with complaints about women professors of colour from white students that range from the way they dress to the way they treat minority and Aboriginal students vis a vis white students in class. In her situation for instance, complaints about dress include the fact that she "wears too many feathers to class" (p. 66). Another struggle results from attempts to

introduce a different worldview and students' response to it. She states, "The uni-cultural (White/Canadian) truth is never described as cultural or racially biased. When another view of the world is introduced it is written off as emotional and not objective (irrational) rather than having to confront and understand that the White/Canadian world view (legal view) is not universal (or objective)" (1995, p. 62). Although not directly related to the latter struggles, Monture-Angus also discusses in full the concept of anger, arguing that it is a problematic concept because it is loaded with someone else's negative readings of her (and other professors of colour) personal accountability for her anger. Moreover, she argues that what she names as anger "feels more like thunder, thunder in my soul. Sometimes, it is a quiet distant rumbling. Other times it rolls over me with such force that I am immobilized" 2 (p. 68). In fact, as I will later demonstrate, in the course of learning about racism, students themselves go through a stage of anger emanating from either feeling "accused" or what they perceive as unfair reading of a text. This anger is expressed in abusive language that becomes evident from the writings students submit to the professor. Yet, from an institutional point of view, professors are supposed to remain "pedagogical" about the abuse and racism they face from students.

By focusing on classroom discourses, the discussion in this paper builds on the literature on teaching about race and racism, and the complexities and struggles involved in this regard. I begin by bringing focus to the ambivalence that students find themselves in, in their attempts to situate and define me as an educator. This focus comes from the role played by my presence as an African-Canadian woman educator in shaping the nature of interaction that occurs in class. In the courses I teach, I have observed that students often get lost, defensive and ambivalent when conversations about race and racism are discussed in class, and this happens more when discussions center on the meaning of whiteness in Canadian society. My presence as an African-Canadian woman educator further complicates classroom discussions as students struggle to express themselves in the presence of someone they identify as black3, therefore, marginalized. Yet, within their struggles, students are quick to label "other" writers and me as "angry black women" in attempt to understand and resolve their own feelings of guilt. Commenting on this guilty-laden trip that students sometimes take Monture-Angus states: "I cannot accept that it is my responsibility to carry the guilt of the oppressor (or silence myself for the sole purpose that the oppressor will not feel badly). Trying to force me to be responsible (at fault) is a powerful tool intended to silence" (p. 63). It is such classroom discourses that prompt me to conclude that the so well debated and now commonly rejected categories of identification and more specifically, identity politics, still play an important role in the way preservice students learn and interpret the world.

The second issue of focus relates to students' unusual attentiveness to the language of identifications in discussions about race differences. Preservice teachers that I work with are simultaneously eager to know the "correct" terminology to use when referring to "others" and quick to identify with diverse others who they read about. My concern is the manner in which students, through perceived politically correct language, often use other people's struggles and oppressions to interpret their own lives, yet, through abusive and derogatory language, dismiss such strives if they collide with their practices. It is the discourses involved in this selection process that this paper discusses. Basically, I argue that the discourses unveiled in this selection process reveal positions of ambivalence, ambiguity, and confusion that make possible the validity of categories of identification. In this sense, to the students I work with, one cannot learn if one is ambivalent or unsure of another's (fixed) identity. Put differently, for students in my classes, defining themselves and others become a prerequisite for learning. However, most often, the identities that students construct for themselves are done at the expense of the identities of "others" they read about or interact with in class.

A few qualifiers are worth noting. The discussion of the manner in which students resist information about racism is intended more to demonstrate the struggles students face in situations that demand a reshaping of old belief systems, than to show that white students are racist. Additionally, this discussion takes into account the many journeys that students make across intellectual borders in attempts to locate themselves politically in the situations they read about (for a full discussion, see, Dlamini, 2002). In this sense, this discussion takes into account that identity is not a sum of singular conscious acts for, as Britzman states, "acts of identity are neither simple nor conscious" (1997, p. 35). There is another qualifier needed here. Referring to the students as white, does not mean that I view them as an undifferentiated mass with uniform practices of privilege and power. In fact, I am aware of the differences that exist within this community and how these differences fashion relations in class. These differences are mainly of socio-economic status and of sexuality - (and, as I will later show, the former gets overly referenced while the latter is barely mentioned).

Over the course of teaching *social and cultural differences,* I have been made aware that a significant number of students refuse to remain in subordinate economic positions, and struggle to get into the preservice program by, for instance, working two jobs and attending university at the same time. Yet, as Britzman points out, "refusing to be subordinated does not guarantee that one will not subordinate another" (p. 34). Therefore, when I stand in front of a class, I am aware that many of the students have more privilege and power than I can ever imagine having, which are derived from skin privilege, or their gender, and sometimes family income. Additionally, I am aware that while

there are a variety of protective measures put in place for students, there are none that protect me as an African-Canadian woman professor with African centered practices that are not always congruent with those of white professors in the university. Monture-Angus states, "there is no protection available to me in any policy if the situation arises where I experience a student who discriminates against me based on my gender, culture or race. Within the law school, the only construct of professor is the individual who holds power" (1995, p. 66). Therefore, the following discussion is also intended to raise questions about the tendency of institutions to function solely on the view that, as educators, African-Canadian and other minority women have power.

WRITING ONESELF IN THE CLASSROOM

> Entering the classroom determined to erase the body and give ourselves over more fully to the mind, we show by our beings how deeply we have accepted the assumption that passion has no place in the classroom. Repression and denial make it possible for us to forget and then desperately seek to recover ourselves, our feelings, our passions in some private place - after class (hooks, 1994, p. 192).

bell hooks cautions of the dangers of educators to claim to make divisions between the mind and the body when entering the classroom. Thus, I enter the classroom with a full willingness to participate in the writing of oneself, and I encourage the preservice students I work with to do the same. Yet as I enter the classroom, I am fully aware of the limited nature of my ability to write myself as an educator, for I very often find myself caught up in what has been negatively discussed in academic scholarship as identity politics (see, for example, Giroux, 1992). My black body automatically enables students to put me into problematic categories that then define the way they relate to me. Thus questions and statements such as "where are you from?" "how long have you been in Canada?" "you have a beautiful accent" are common subjects that I respond to in each classroom I enter. As a receiver of these questions, I am often struck by the insensitivity of the questioners to what these questions and statements represent. I wonder whether those who ask such questions are aware of the "othering" embedded in these questions, and of the potential to position others as 'not Canadian enough'.

On the other hand, however, I am aware that these are often genuine questions and statements designed not only to start conversations, but also to solicit information about "the other" such that knowledge could be gained and relationships developed. There is another reality that informs my

interpretation of these questions and statements. Halifax is a highly segregated Anglo-Saxon city where, up until recently, people of different ethnic backgrounds occupied different geopolitical spaces. Most noticeably are the social and geopolitical boundaries that divide Nova Scotia's indigenous Black and Aboriginal populations from the rest of the population. Testimonies from students indicate that the majority of them have never had a person of colour teach them. Moreover, many of their experiences are centered in rural white Nova Scotia where racist jokes are still part and parcel of everyday community repertoires. Thus, I read some of the questions as expressions of a genuine desire to learn from someone who is different from them and by implication, someone who embodies different sociopolitical and cultural knowledge and experiences. However, while giving meaningful responses to some of these questions, I am often struck and troubled by the manner students select for themselves that which they want to embrace, validate and use, from that which they want to disregard, devalue and discard.

Attempts towards responding to the question "where are you from?" have proved to be more complex over the years. First, I view this question as loaded with power, for among other things, once the responder gives out her place of origin, another question or statement follows, one that simultaneously gives and seeks information. For instance, upon hearing that I was born in South Africa, most students respond with the statement, "tell us what it was like growing up under apartheid". Such a statement informs of the knowledge students have about South Africa, that is, apartheid and its atrocities, and at the same time seeks for biographic information from someone whom they assume embodies the painful scars of apartheid. I always struggle to answer this statement because it is one that positions me as a victim of apartheid, therefore, puts me in a marginal position. What compounds my struggle is the reality that I actually did not grow up under apartheid and, far from being its victim, I benefited from the struggles of my parents who left South Africa when I was three years old and ensured that we experienced the best from exile, despite limited geopolitical stability. Ironically, this latter information does not probe the questioners to proceed and ask, "how was it growing up in exile?" for this information does not fit the images students have of South Africans. The desire to understand me as an educator, to create for me categories of identification, becomes even more complex when I offer narratives that do not affirm the students' assumption; the assumption that people like me share certain kinds of experiences and practices that could be used to define who they are.

One of the subjects in the social and cultural differences course I teach centers around teachers' ability to recognize and address the diversity of cultures in their classrooms. This subject is premised on the reality of the changing Canadian mainstream from White, English and middle-class

to intercultural and multilingual. Such changes present a challenge to the education system, as teachers are ill prepared to work with students from diverse backgrounds. One student requested that I offer examples of the kind of music a recent immigrant high-school student from South Africa would be interested in because he wanted to use music lyrics in teaching poetry. This request was based on the preservice teacher's desire to include and legitimize all cultures in his classroom, yet premised on the problematic assumption that a South African student can only be interested in South African music or that a South African could be more knowledgeable about South African music. The following class, I brought in three South Africa music genres.

The first was a traditional genre commonly known in Zulu as *omasikandi* 4. In this genre, the participants dress in traditional Zulu gear made from cow skin and feathers. The participants usually dance in a choreographed manner, responding to drumming. In some instances, the dancers sing together with the drum, and the songs they sing are historic, usually narrating stories from pre-colonial South Africa; some are about wars and conquest. In some instances, the songs are about the event being celebrated, for example, a wedding celebration. The drum "talks", signaling the dancers to move in particular ways, usually movements that imitate the practices of wild animals, such as a lion or tiger hunting. Despite its "pre-modern" state (and by implication, "illiterate" in make up), this genre is still found in many South African communities, both urban and rural. Because this genre is difficult to describe up to the point where others can visualize its songs, and this is more so since most of what happens does not involve words, I brought one of my home videos to show to the class. Students admitted that this was the first time they were exposed to this kind of music, that they liked and wanted to know where they could access it. After watching this video, we also discussed issues of literacy and power. Usually, those who still engage in such dances are, because of colonialism, viewed as backward, traditional and illiterate. This interpretation is common despite the fact that nowadays, most who engage in *omasikandi* are literate people such as myself. In addition, we spoke about the power in silence, given the fact that usually what is powerful and moving in such music is not the words, but the movements of the dancers.

The second genre I brought was a CD of what many people know as typically South African, the music of Black Mambazo, problematically known as "world/ethnic" music since andlbecause of its popularization by Paul Simon and his 1986 Graceland album. Some students were familiar with *this* music and in fact, admitted that *this* is what they consider to be "real" South African music. We also spoke about the politics and power of representation. Here, Paul Simon selected one form of music to focus on which was then taken as the "real" legitimate South African music.

The third genre is what I loosely refer to as "modem" music, highly influenced by western

genres and usually associated with youth culture. Besides language, *this* music is not different from the music that youth in North America listen to. This set of music includes rap, pop, etc., and is viewed in South Africa as representing modernity and western ways of living. Many of the students were not aware that youth in South Africa have access to and are interested in music similar to music that they too were interested in as teenagers. When discussion was over, the student who had made the original request asked the question, "so, what kind of music would a newly arrived South African high school student be interested in?" I was frustrated by the implication that I had failed to respond to the student's request, that is, provide a neat category of music that a South African immigrant high school student would fit into.

What I had attempted to show in *this* class was the fluidity of identities and the diverse cultures including diverse music genres that shape these identities. I had aimed at showing how some South African high-school students might not be interested in music at all, and would therefore not be in a position to offer any information about music when asked to by a teacher, and that those who might be interested might lack words to express a genre such as *omasikandi,* not because they are illiterate, but mainly because some forms of music lack words to express them.

In addition to the tendency to create categories of identification for others, I have noticed that preservice students have difficulty dealing with people of colour who do not share experiences of marginality before arriving in Canada. For instance, in cases where we share our introduction to the written word, I usually narrate my experiences of being brought up by two parents who were both teachers, and who believed in education as a vehicle towards social mobility. This narration is one that usually diminishes students' terms of reference for their assumptions of how and where Black children learn to read and write get challenged. In particular, I narrate the manner in which my mother taught me how to read and write, and the incident that led to this endeavor (also narrated in Dlamini, 2001).

My first encounter with the written word was as a child living in a classroom in an elementary school where both my parents taught that also acted as our family house. The school was located on the northern border of Swaziland and South Africa, in a small town called Mashobeni North. My father had taken a position as school principal and arrived at the school with my elder sister and me about one term prior to mother's arrival. When mother finally joined US halfway into the school year, we were supposed to, at the very least, have learnt the alphabet, and at the most should have been able to string or code the alphabet together to form words. The first day mother came to the school and was introduced to the other teachers and to their classrooms was to be my first introduction to the alphabet. I was five years old and in a grade one class with my sister Skhumbuzo who was six

years old. Our teacher, Mrs. Mavimbela, had divided the class into two groups: those whom she was teaching and would move on to the second grade the following year, and those who observed and imitated others being taught and were expected to repeat the first grade. The rationale for *this* division was that the latter group was not serious enough. that is, it was too playful. I was in the playful group and my sister was in the studious group.

Personally, I enjoyed our group very much for we were not charged with the responsibilities of reading and writing. When time for reading came, we were expected to follow in our books by imitating students from the studious group. We used to spend virtually the entire school day at the end of the room, next to the coal stove, playing various games. I remember being an expert in a game we called "frog". The gist of the game was to try to jump like frogs from one end of the room to the other and whoever reached the other side first was the winner. There must have been about ten of us between the ages of five and eight in this group. The shorter you were, the easier it was to manoeuvre and crimp your body in a small space, and, in addition to my love for playing, I think I usually won this game because I was shorter and smaller than most. When mother first came to Mashobeni North, this is the situation she found me in. Even though I was still a young child, I remember Mrs Mavimbela explaining to mother the logistics behind putting my group where it was and assuring her that we were happy. To demonstrate our happiness, Mrs Mavimbela asked us to show mother how we played "frog", and, as in other occasions, I won. We were very happy indeed!

That afternoon mother had a talk with father expressing her disbelief at the situation. All along I had been able to fool father into believing that I, like my sister, could read. Mother gave me a grade one book and asked me to read for them, and I did so without any problems. I had memorized the book from the first to the last page. I was smart! However, when mother wrote those very same words on a plain piece of paper, I could not pronounce even one of them. So it came to be that mother began to teach me the alphabet, and later, reading and writing.

This narration is usually given to demonstrate the relationship between school, family and home, for I see my own upbringing as a classic case of benefits accrued from the possession of valued cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977). I cannot, for instance, ignore the fact that coming out of a home that valued education, and having been brought up by two parents who were teachers, greatly contributed to my general view of education and, more importantly, to my school success. Many of the preservice students I work with, however, have difficulty dealing with my privileged background for it refutes most of what they know about people who look like me, and moreover, it takes away the power derived from possessing knowledge of "the other". I do not fit neatly into the category of the disadvantaged; therefore, this presents discourses of ambiguity, and discourses that leave one

ambivalent, not knowing what to make of "the other". Yet, as I show in the following section, such ambiguity and ambivalence are removed when teaching and learning about race and racism.

EXCERPTS FROM TEACHING ABOUT RACE AND RACISM

In addition to writing myself in the classroom I thrive to teach in a critical pedagogy way. I do this with a conscious awareness that the application of some of the critical pedagogy principles is controversial and sometimes contradictory as it opens space for the marginalization of some of the discourses sought to be empowered (Dlamini, 2002). One of the concepts of critical pedagogy that I embrace and practice in my own teaching is the concept of power sharing which, in a nutshell, make students equally responsible for their own learning. When power is shared in the classroom voices are given equal opportunity of expression; different critical ways of knowing and learning are validated. Through experience, I have also come to realize that validating knowledge assumes the ability to also invalidate certain knowledge through, among other things, analysis and criticism. As a Black woman professor, I have come to realise that sharing power with students who traditionally have always occupied positions of power becomes complex when one is teaching about and in ways that challenge existing relations of power.

Over the years of teaching the course *social and cultural differences,* I have come to realise that while students are willing to examine issues of sexuality, gender and class inequalities, there are problems with examining racism. Also, while students are willing to remain confused by how to define me, this ambivalence is removed when teaching and learning about race based differences. While many of the students readily recognize themselves as white by description, often they fail to acknowledge or understand the privileges granted by/through this description. In fact, white privilege is often invisible to these students and so is their participation in the ideology of whiteness. Those who actually see the relationship between whiteness and relations of power often individually distance themselves from racism through, among other things, simply laying claim to marginality because of, for example, working class status5.

Denial

When white students begin to learn about benefits from and participation in the ideology of whiteness, they respond in different ways at different phases of the course. A common response that I have found is denial. Most students believe in the legend that Canada is a "non-racial", functional,

multicultural country where people of different ethnic backgrounds enjoy the same privileges. Students who believe in this myth often go out on a limb to explain why what is considered a racist act might actually be something else. In this sense, testimonies of racism are questioned, analysed and sometimes outwardly rejected as false accusations. Thus, phrases like "what is difficult for me to understand is that many of the events that seem like racist acts do not appear racist in any way to me" or, "to consider that act as a blatant act of racism doesn't seem justified", are common responses of denial. A common trend of explaining why racial testimonies are not really about race is that some of the testimonies describe events that also happen to white students. These include incidences of being bumped into in hallways, or not being invited to "do coffee" by work-mates (this is despite the fact that it is common knowledge that the coffee will serve as a "debriefing" session for the staff meeting held that morning and in it will be discussed work related issues crucial to one's success).

Another form of denial happens when students are quick to point out that they too, have been discriminated against. Often students would give accounts of gender or class discrimination and use these as catalyst for understanding race issues. I refer to this as a form of denial because often the result is that the racism issue being discussed gets denied analysis. Discussions often move towards the direction of counterbalancing the study of racism with those issues that white students feel important to them. The result, once again, is the subordination of issues that directly affect racial minorities.

Denial also occurs when students become more concerned about projecting and maintaining a positive or non-racist self-image, rather than the injustice of racism. A very common statement typical of this form of denial is, "I'm not racist", As one student wrote, "As soon as this class started, I put myself behind a screen with the mindset that I didn't need to worry about my own belief system coming under attack because I am not racist" (emphasis mine). Wellman (1977) refers to this as distancing oneself. He argues that this happens because white people view racism as tantamount to personal prejudice. When one does not "feel" prejudiced then racism must be someone else's problem. This individualized way of viewing racism fails to consider racism as a product of social and economic structures that benefit whites more than "others".

Anger, frustration and the loss of politically correct language

In addition to a denial of racism some students respond with anger partly because they feel attacked. Thus, one student wrote, "I think it [the class] was meant to be provoking but for many people it seemed to act as an irritant and people become offended, silent and hostile. Whether that

was the desired reaction, I don't know". When students feel attacked they either defend themselves and/or fight back. Often, responses to "attacks" are imminent in some of the response papers students write. The following response to Essed's (1990) documentation of African American and German women's narration of racism exemplifies what 1 see as "a fight back": "this is the problem with these cases; you only get one side of the story. What appears as racism mayor may not be. There could be personal problems between the two women that we as readers are not aware of. I need to understand the complete story in order to not say screw you [sic] to this case. All we have is a narration of a somehow angry black person whom I suspect is equally racist to white people". Sometimes the anger is directed towards other classmates, those identified to be like the professor either by ideology or by racial group. When students feel angry, their concerns about the use of "correct" polite language diminishes. Clearly, their anger gets expressed through language and in some instances, through body language.

It is notably this group of students that makes clear ethnic categories of identification and by so doing, removes the ambivalence that might have existed before, in classes for example, where discussions focussed on music and dance, "the exotic other", Clearly, at this juncture I am categorized as a black person who has provided a problematic subject that makes students feel irritated, angry and outwardly hostile. This past year a student asked me if I was sure that I had read a book I had prescribed because if I had read it, I wouldn't have asked the class to read it. Upon responding that I had indeed read the book, the student proceeded to ask if I was sure that I wasn't angry with white people. The underlying statement of course is that I provided these readings because I am angry and therefore vengeful towards white people.

In addition to identifying "others", students also identify those with whom they share beliefs and practices, a practise I call "clicking". As the course progresses, one starts to notice clicks symbolized by patterns of communication, ideology, space, and often just simply social style. Patterns of communicating ideas vary in each click. A click constituted by those who feel angry towards the professor have opening phrases like "we hope you don't take this personally", "we were wondering whether this is your personal experience"; "do you in particular feel that some of us are", "a number of us feel that," etc. Common with this group is a combined use of the personal to refer to the professor and the use of "we", to shield away from any analysis or criticism of individual subject position - capitalising on the common understanding of power in numbers. It is as if to say "what I am saying now is not just my opinion, a number of us think the same way so you can't criticize me because I represent us".

When students are angry or uncomfortable, they look for someone to blame for their feelings

and are quick to criticize classroom discourses that had all along prevailed without problems. For instance, during discussions on comfortable subjects such as music, discussions tend to be informal and do not take the traditional turn-taking procedure. While students respect each other's voices, in some instances, they jump in, add, comment or sometimes question a speaker about his/her position. The students in fact welcome this discourse and positively comment on its unconventional and sporadic nature, as long as the subject discussed presents them with comfort. In instances where race and racism are discussed, this very discourse is negatively commented on and students are quick to label those who jump in as rude, unprofessional, and in my case, not familiar with teaching practices. In such instances students are quick to resort to the familiar, to what bell hooks terms middle class discourses:

> I have found that students from upper-and middle class backgrounds are disturbed if heated exchange takes place in the classroom. Many of them equate loud talk or interruptions with rude and threatening behaviour. Yet those of us from working-class backgrounds may feel that discussion is deeper and richer if it arouses intense responses, In class, students are often disturbed if anyone is interrupted while speaking, even though outside class most of them are not threatened (hooks, 1994, p.187).

Identifications

Identifications also play a significant role in the study of racial inequality. When students read about accounts of racism, they are quick to respond by identifying with the characters in the text. One example comes from Essed's (1990) narration of Black women's experiences of racism in the United States and the Netherlands. One of the women explains how she was discouraged from going into the sciences by her guidance counsellor in her high school. Many students respond by, "I know exactly what she means. The same thing happened to me at high school when I approached the guidance counsellor for advice about going to university. I was discouraged from the sciences and told I was better off in the Arts". James (2000) is insightful in this regard:

> In our interactions or communications, we tend to borrow from our experience and understanding of difference and apply it to others. On this basis, we might hear one person say to another, "I get treated the same way", or "I have been asked the same question by the police"... Nor is context considered; that is why it is not surprising to hear comments such as

> this from a dominant-group member: "I know what it's like to be a minority because when I was in Jamaica." Inherent in this statement is the idea that being a minority group member in the Canadian context is the same as being one in the Jamaican context and that in both contexts minority status is interpreted in the same way (p. 15).

Another interesting type of identification occurs when students are quick to accept points from a text of one's own background. For instance, in *social and cultural differences,* students are troubled by experiences of racism if documented by people of colour. Testimonies of racism documented in books like Lee (1985), and Essed (1990), are either dismissed as false accusations or, students are keen to argue that the incident described was not racially motivated. For instance, Lee offers this case:

> So one of the representatives from a highly "academic" school came to talk to the grade eights in a school near to yours. As the kids were filing into the hall, one Black student who is known for mouthing off to teachers was grabbed by the guidance counsellor and asked just where he thought he was going. He made it very clear to the youngster that there was no way that he could ever go to that type of school.. He was told to return to his classroom. This student...was not his usual self. He is not one for tears but this time he wept openly (1985, p. 58).

While a few students would see this incidence as demonstrating racism, many are keen to defend and explain the actions of the guidance counsellor, arguing that he might have been afraid that the boy will be disorderly during the information session. The fact that the boy was hurt is ignored, and the reality that this guidance counsellor was making negative assumptions about the boy's academic abilities is undermined. Citing Kelman and Hamilton (1989), Rosenberg defines this as "identification with the aggressor (which) locates responsibility for one's behaviour outside oneself and removes the guilt and conflict that the behaviour would otherwise cause" (1997, p. 89). On the other side, however, students accept testimonies of racism documented by authors they perceive to be like them. Notably in this instance is the documentation of white privilege and racism by Allingham (1992), Rosenberg (1997), and Sleeter (1992). Of Allingham, students usually perceive her as speaking from her own perspective, therefore, "not accusing anyone" 6. Of Rosenberg, they view. her analysis of racism, especially of her student Kristin, as insightful and very eye opening especially with regard to the selection of memory. And of Sleeter, students are keen to

agree with her categories of how teachers respond to multiculturalism changes in schools, arguing that these responses are "natural" as they indicate in a "professional" manner teachers' vested interest. Students' different responses to text written by someone perceived as one of their own results in questions about efforts directed at redefining power relations, and about what has been loosely termed in academic scholarship "redefining the margins". Students' responses reveal a problematic detection that change is most likely to happen when those who have power are willing to talk about the inequalities produced through their possession of power. Following Lorde, (1984) one is prompted to ask, can the empire's tools ever dismantle the empire's house?

Another set of identifications is found in those who begin to foster identifications across culturally constructed lines of race, gender, religion and sexuality. Often I wonder if this is a viable political strategy, whether or not I should encourage such identifications. Harlow (1991) argues that "identifying with" is more than just a personal moral duty; rather it is a political choice. For Harlow, such identifications are important whenever the dominant discourse creates a discourse of categorization, regulating and patrolling social identities. When members seen to belong to the dominant group "identify with" the marginalized, the boundaries of differentiation are challenged. While this might be true, I personally find "identifying with" problematic in that usually symbols of identifying with are idealised fantasies, based not on the experiences of the marginalized, but rather on the nostalgic, idealized imaginary usurpations of the dominant. Thus in a situation of political action, for instance, ideas of those familiar with power define how that action is to take place, in this way marking the imperial nature of cross-identifications, "identifying with".

CONCLUSION

Following Freire (1970), I argue that for education to be meaningful, learning has to emanate, in part, from the lives of the learners, from their hopes and dreams. I strive to facilitate and honour students' dreams and to be one with them as seekers of knowledge. I do this, however, with a conscious awareness that the knowledge that emanates from them about people like me, is in collusion with the spirit crucial for developing a progressive community of learners. Students' prior knowledge and experiences are often congruent with practices that facilitate marginality and white supremacy. The disconcerting and discomforting meanings that have grown out of students' knowledge about people of colour, prohibits the agenda of a liberating pedagogy for this knowledge, problematic as it is, provides students with comfort and nurtures their investments. The struggle for locating one's subjectivity as fluid, borne of multiple practices and desires, gets undermined through

the emphasis on ethnic and cultural-based categories that students bring into the classroom. I argue, then, that the struggle to assert one's identity as fluid and as drawn from multiple and changing practices and desires is complex, and often futility is evident in courses that examine racial inequalities. I urge educators to rethink what it means to challenge the application of concepts such as race and culture and to ask: who is in a position to dismiss these categories and to what end? I see the tendency to dismiss categories of identification including the binary opposites of black or white, literate or ignorant, as a luxury of those at the centre, for I view myself as a casualty of being "fixed" in the identity 'black'.

Meaning is socially constructed. Yet, the social material used in the construction of meaning is rarely given full critique in preservice education. There are fundamental assumptions and practices that limit the contribution brought into preservice education by scholars of colour. The first limitation emanates from lack of institutional support, and more importantly, lack of support from people who work in education departments. Departments of education in Nova Scotia are staffed by mainly white, middle-class, middle-aged professors whose values and practices are not different from those of the students described in this paper. These professors carried out their own studies at a time when issues of multiculturalisrn, anti-racism and difference were unheard of. Records indicate that in the Department of Education in the University of which I am part, there have never been any institutional efforts towards professional development around issues of race and difference. While preservice students are expected to engage in anti-racism and progressive educational practices, it is unclear from where they are to learn such practices. If, for instance, they are expected to learn these practices from their professors, how did these professors come to such knowledge? Did these white-middle-class middle-aged professors come to anti-racism and multicultural discourses through association? Assumptions about professors' ability to self-educate are questionable when one gets remarks indicating that the work done by people of colour, such as myself, is undermined and negatively positioned in these professors' classrooms?

The second limitation comes from the failure of education to provide a theory that informs us about the power and processes of identifications by those at the centre. This limitation becomes more dangerous when realizing that identifications influence the manner by which preservice students come to select and use knowledge. The fact that part of text-based knowledge selection and validation about racial inequities is partly derived from information about authors' ethnicities and locations, becomes food for thought when one acknowledges that such practice might also exist in the selection and validation of education professors and their works. It is safe to conclude that preservice teachers are comfortable selecting and valuing the practices of professors that closely

resemble their owns, and disheartening to realize that, as Andre Lorde would say, surely, these professors' tools are not designed to dismantle the masters' house, white privilege.

NOTES

1 Here, I am aware of existing discussions on child psychology and development in which children are said to accumulate concepts regarding say, temperature continuum, by learning first, the concepts "hot" and "cold". Nonetheless, even in such situations, as children develop, concepts such as "warm", which subsequently leads to a modification of the binary logic, mediate this binary logic. (For a fuller discussion of the binary discrimination and mediation procedure model, see, for example, Egan, 1999).

2 In this section Monture-Angus also speaks of the limitations she faces trying to use English to express her experiences as a Mohawk woman: "English is the language of my colonization. Language is implicitly loaded with a series of cultural presumptions, which I do not necessarily share and perhaps may not even be aware of This, in part, is a result of not sharing the same culture with other speakers of the English language" (p. 68). I find this assertion powerfully relating to my own feelings and experiences with regards to my use of English in such teaching situations. More recently, I have been unsuccessfully attempting to find suitable English words to express the feelings I had while going through the process of re-appointment (fall 2001). While in my own mother language, Zulu, these words seem easy and direct, they do not translate well into English and their translation may result in a negative categorization of me as an "angry" person. This, however, is a project for another time.

3 While I use the concept "African-Canadian" to define myself: the concept "black" is used to capture the privilege assigned to skin colour. Historically and presently, skin colour remains a

powerful basis for determining the allocation of material and symbolic benefits and punishments in society. Money and wealth constitute part of the criteria used to construct identities.

4 I refer to this genre as traditional because it draws mainly on "the old" pre-colonial music practices including dress and language. This genre is also one where gender lines are clearly drawn; man's and woman's dance and space are respected and separated, as the two genders do not mix unless in a playful competing manner. However, this practice is changing as I learnt in 1998 during my own ancestral wedding celebration that the commercialization of this genre has led to a blaring of spaces. The video that I brought to class indicated a gender mix with women participating in the men's dance. The dresses, and language, however, remain unchanged.

5 This statement is not intended to downplay the impact of poverty on educational practices. In fact, in this course there is a section devoted to examining different ways in which schools fail the poor. However, the point here is that discussions about racism and white privilege are often undermined by an introduction of another "ism", this being class - a subject that most students are comfortable talking about and locating themselves as victims of.

6 I have to add, however, that some students are often resistant to Allingham's statement: "I am a recovering racist" arguing that this statement lumps all White people together as racist. Some have been disturbed by this statement because to them it holds the same apprehensions that an alcoholic might have including, the fear of falling back, the daily efforts that one has to make to avoid temptation, are just a few practices in which a "recovering" person gets engaged. All this said, the point is, that students view Allingham as representing their interests as opposed to other authors such as Essed and Lee.

7 The manner in which work by professors of colour is devalued is evident from Senate-approved student evaluations and from the manner these evaluations become weapons used by the Education Faculty to deny one access to re-appointment or tenure.

8 I am aware that the claim I am making here needs what, in academic scholarship, is referred to as "hard evidence". Yet, without apologies, I make this claim drawing from my own experiences (both hard and soft, liquid and solid) in Canadian universities.

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