'By Virtue of Being White': resistance in anti-racist pedagogy

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ABSTRACT   *This research, which employs post-structuralist and psychoanalytic theories of identity, investigates processes by which white, racialised identities are inscribed as normative constructions in the discourses of white pre-service teachers at a Canadian university. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with white students whose desires for respectability and legitimacy are at odds with the imminent critique of anti-racist pedagogy. The analysis indicates processes by which research participants are able to profess liberal values and innocence from racist acts while accessing discursive repertoires which perform them as racially dominant. The power of dominant groups to resist oppositional pedagogies problematises the potential for whiteness to affirm itself, even as a virtue, in sites of liberal teacher education. The article questions how white pre-service teachers' desires for goodness might be thought in ways which support instability and flux, notwithstanding students' desires for secure identities.*

The complex forms in which racism exists in first world, Western countries require new and equally complex means of addressing the production of racism if anti-racist activity is to have any efficacy. The perception of whether racism is a problem, how it should be addressed, and who should be doing the addressing are questions that can appropriately be raised in the context of pre-service teacher education programmes. Research reported in this article is concerned with the context and identity formation of pre-service teachers—identifications which inform decision-making about whether or how to address racism in public education systems. In a country like Canada, for example, making experiences of racism visible exposes the contradictions and complicity of the nation, but it does not expose the inner working of logics by which racism is justified and normalised. That racism exists is not in dispute, but what is less clearly understood is the construction of 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1980) within which racism is produced and becomes effective; and how subjects are produced within racialised identifications so that normalisation is a probability and, and perhaps, a necessity, for the construction of domination. The education of pre-service education students must surely consider whether white teachers are even conscious of their racialised status or alternately, how have they remained ignorant of it. Further, how does their awareness or the lack of

it affect their interest in anti-racist work? How does their racialisation affect their assumptions about their potential to qualify as a teacher?

Interest in the construction of whiteness follows my own attempts at oppositional pedagogy, including feminist, anti-homophobic and anti-racist. I realise that the resistance I encounter is not just about my teaching but that there is resistance around oppositional teaching in general. I have wondered why students are often angry about the material, why it seems to threaten them so much, why they make the same predictable arguments over and over again. Resistance is not new, of course. Along with other researchers and practitioners concerned with resistance, I often ask: what uses does it serve, where does it lie within each of us, are we doing our jobs if there is no resistance?

The range of resistance I have encountered, especially in the uncovering of racism, suggests the need for a closer examination of what it is that makes such teaching and learning difficult to accomplish. Certainly, students exhibit a range of reactions to explicit teaching about anti-racist education, including acceptance, rejection and denial; but most significantly, I have observed the difficulty of making a significant impression on white pre-service teachers regarding the salience of race issues for schooling. As Christine Sleeter, a white educator involved in anti-racist work among white teachers, cautions, 'while I believe whites are educable, I have gained appreciation for the strength of our resistance to change' (1993, p. 168). In the research on which this article reports, I struggle to learn how any of us white teachers can become aware of the significance of our own racialised identifications and the implications for our coming to race consciousness. In particular, how do attempts to maintain dominant, secure identities on the part of white students and their teachers complicate students' engagement with oppositional pedagogies? What do these inner logics by which racism is justified suggest for pedagogical possibilities? It is the construction of a white self and the implications for anti-racist pedagogy that I hope to uncover.

The Research

Conducted in 1997 at a Canadian university, the research investigates the racialisation of 18 white pre-service teachers and the implications of racialisation on their reception of anti-racist pedagogy. The research follows a post-structuralist discourse analysis on the identity construction of these white-identified education students, particularly in regard to the processes whereby they have been able to signal or accomplish themselves as racially dominant. On the one hand, I am not attempting to identify individuals as racist or not. Rather, I analyse participant discourses as social practices in which racialised identities can be read in the assumptions research participants make and the language they use—language which appears 'normal' and which accomplishes the research participants as dominant racialised identities. This scrutiny of 'normal' racial dominance might seem like a fine point when there is so much overt racism that goes unchallenged every day. But I think it is the appearance of normality in the conversations of would-be teachers who intend to 'make a difference', for example, which gives racism its licence. Although research partici-

pants [1] in this study are by no means uniform in their responses, an analysis of their discourses indicates that they are in possession of 'suitable' raced knowledges and assumptions of a self which already conforms to expectations of who may be a teacher. These identifications both confirm the students in their roles as teachers and complicate their reception of anti-racist pedagogy.

This work looks at how white pre-service education students promote themselves as dominant following a compulsory cross-cultural course which all participants completed at least 6 months to 2 years prior to the interviews. I examine how cross-cultural/anti-racist work is resisted and how students can ensure that, for the most part, no real or significant learning takes place because of how they are positioned and privileged in such courses. I see this resistance as a serious problem because these are the students who are about to graduate and look for jobs and are now presumed to have cross-cultural, anti-racist training, directly from their university experience. They are the ones who are 'presumed to know', even though the research indicates that, for many white pre-service teachers, resistance to this learning is considerable. With other writers on this topic (Felman, 1987; Britzman, 1995), I recognise that this negative reaction to anti-racist and cross-cultural work is complicated by a desire 'not to know'. Following the work of those writers (Lacan, 1977; Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Butler, 1993) who describe the changing, fluid nature of identity construction, I continue to investigate whether and how desires to be 'good students' can support these same pre-service teachers as they examine what it is that they are afraid to know.

It is important to note that in this research, I chose to interview people who declare themselves sympathetic to teaching 'the Other', who, in this Western Canadian context, are Aboriginal [2] children. At least unconsciously, students understand that their production as good white subject identities involves the maintenance and expression of liberal consciousness and social sanctions against overtly racist remarks. They understand the high correlation between whiteness, liberal social attitudes and education. Participants' desire is to accomplish a respectable, white, liberal, self-image and to present themselves in a positive light within the context of acceptable social discourse; within the bounds of the interviews, no one is overtly hostile to racialised minorities. When conducting the analysis, therefore, I was not looking to 'catch them out'; nor did I have assumptions for assessing what they say as racist, or mistaken, or of finding in them some false consciousness or motives for why these pre-service teachers might say the things they do. It is not their individual assessments I was interested in, but rather in what social and discursive processes are available to them as they produce themselves as dominant white pre-service teachers. What is it that passes for acceptable liberal discourse? What is sayable in this context? What social identities are performed and iterated in these discursive practices?

For these would-be teachers, the accomplishment of white supremacy and the 'naturalness' of its reproduction are dependent on an assumed link between whiteness and innocence. Participants in this research show how practices of white supremacy are reinforced by links which are both fixed and elastic—as others have observed: 'The master narrative could make any number of adjustments to keep

"subjects'" (p. 3). These beings inhabit the 'unliveable' and the 'uninhabitable' zones of social life populated by considerable numbers who do not enjoy the status of subjects. That the subject is prefigured by exclusions and de-authorised subjects, abjections and 'populations erased from view' (Butler, 1992, p. 13) obscures, defers—and forgets—the materiality of the subject's construction; and this construction obscures the very productivity of its forgetting. Contrary to the notion of a self-determining individual, the figure of the autonomous self is not even a possibility when it is recognised as a logical consequence of disavowed dependency, that is, the subject is dependent for its selfhood on what it disavows as the not-subject, not-self; the subject is dependent on that which is unliveable and uninhabitable. By 'forgetting' the constructedness of the subject, the illusion of autonomy is maintained. In this research, both the danger of the other and the desire of the subject for what it lacks are exacerbated by tenets of the pre-service teachers' compulsory, cross-cultural course. The implicit critique of whiteness and its privileges calls into question the contingency of participants' identifications as ideal selves: white, middle-class helpers. The implicit critique made by the course suggests more than the subjects' lack, however; it also undermines the normative assumptions about the very 'respectability' and 'goodness' of these teacher identities.

In many ways, students I interviewed following their anti-racist course understand that their whiteness is predicated on the racialisation and subordination of others. Whether this positioning is named or not, participants' access to dominance is based on power relations that are continually accessed and held as a standard or measure of accountability. Aída Hurtado (1996) explains this as follows:

> Whether individual whites use these mechanisms or not is irrelevant to the outcome of the white group's superiority, and certainly the studies conducted so far suggest that most whites are *socialised to employ them*, whether or not they actually do. (p. 149, emphasis added)

That participants can employ certain identities is dependent on social relations already in place, even as their claims are productive of those identities. For example, their claims that they are 'typical' or even without a particular identity are already premised on the history of white domination that appears normal and natural. That they can make these discursive claims accomplishes them as ideal, Canadian (white) teacher candidates.

The salience of whiteness cannot be overstated. The successful production of white domination as a demonstration of respectability is part of a teacher's qualification and access to governance. This social practice is prefaced by nineteenth-century European society in which the rise of the middle class paralleled the decline of the aristocracy with its sinecure of 'bloodlines' as proof of legitimacy. Middle classes achieved legitimacy through the imprimatur of themselves as 'citizen', a process based on hierarchical social relations of race, gender, class, sexuality, language, religion, regionality, ethnicity, nationality and so forth. Citizen identity afforded respectability and access to a way of life associated with privilege, governance of the populace, and devotion to one's duty to uphold standards of morality

as practised by the middle-classes. The process of respectability depended entirely on the construction and demarcation of boundaries between what was considered degenerate/healthy, disciplined/undisciplined and self/other as reinforced by the bourgeois 'way of living' (Stoler, 1995).

'Whiteness' was a creation of the moral rectitude of bourgeois society formed against the bodies of 'immoral European working class and native Other, [as well as] against those of destitute whites in the colonies' (Stoler, 1995, p. 100). Because few settlers in early homesteads on the Canadian prairies actually enjoyed a life of middle-class privilege, European identity on the prairies was even more precarious and in a state of flux for many people. Historically and today, the 'narcissism of minor differences' among white ethnic groups—along with the intersection of class differences—plays a role in distinguishing shades of whiteness. For, as far as white identification was concerned, the Aboriginal child could never be anything but Aboriginal; but for Europeans, whiteness was theirs to lose considering the significant risk incurred in not upholding the markers of the bourgeoisie and the production of their values as normative [3].

As seen in this study, participant desire for positive self-presentation is palpable:

> I think I have more awareness than most Canadians do, just from talking to other people. I don't like that idea, … I wish I was typical but I don't think I am, at least in that area. (F6612)

> it should be an important part of education if we're going to continue to live this way and to foster good attitudes. Because not every kid is learning at home the same way I did. I know that very much. My parents were very tolerant. (F088)

Following the cross-cultural course, however, participants are faced with the dilemma that the white privileges they hope to maintain find them complicit in the events which liberal attitudes condemn. That participants are not secure in these shifting qualifications for legitimacy can be read in their intense and conflicted desires. Students in this research are mainly from working-class families; many are of second or third generation descent from non-Anglo-European settlement. For many, their identification as teachers signals their families' first entrance into professional status; they make inordinate efforts to confirm themselves in respectable and secure spaces. In spite of their social positionings as white, educated, politically correct individuals, however, their insecurity is obvious. They understand very clearly that there is a desired and dominant way to present oneself, that they may not be achieving this, that this achieving is not a secure thing, but that it matters a great deal. Participants' desire may be read in their anxiety about not producing themselves as respectable and legitimate, as subjects who claim normative identifications as citizens, persons and bodies that matter (Butler, 1993).

Participants' intense desire for positive self-production cannot be separated from their overriding desire for and interest in Aboriginal peoples. This expression of desire is evinced in the construction of a subject identity which requires the citation of its constitutive outside—an outside which remains an alterity, an exclusion and an

abject other. Against this lack and in their desire for wholeness and completion, participants have been trying to distinguish themselves as agents—as opposed to objects—in the process of identity formation. But how can this desire for the other be explained? For, if participants desire to possess or identify with the other, how are they to be distinguished as agents of their own production? How will they retain their qualifications for knowing and marking difference? Without distinctions, what will remain to mark the difference between inside/outside, between what is clean and what is degenerate (McClintock, 1995)?

At first, participants explain their desire for the other as a wish for greater understanding of those whom the participants see as unlike them, as a lack (Chow, 1993); on closer examination, however, participants' desires are continually linked to that which the other is presumed to have—a sense of self and an awareness of one's own identity. Evidence to the contrary, 'the Native' is assumed to be fully present, transparent and knowable. Participants imagine that 'the Native'—in spite and perhaps because of oppression—is in touch with an essential self, a self which the oppressor has exchanged for progress and supremacy:

> You know they have, *Natives have a very rich heritage and I really feel like I missed out on that.* I'm not really religious, I don't go to church, so I feel that there's sort of that connection with, I don't know, your spiritual side or whatever, it has always been kind of put to the side because, well Christmas or Easter are the only times, you know, that I've really paid attention to sort of a structured religion or whatever. You know, finding out about a lot of the things that Natives do and believe in, *I just was amazed at how rich, you know, that their culture really is.* (F814)

> The benefit is that if something that we've been using in our own culture or race doesn't really, doesn't really seem to be working then maybe we can look outwards and look how other cultures deal with it. *We end up with increased ability to be diverse.* (F731)

> I think [the discussion of multiculturalism] comes up a lot more when we have somebody of a different race or culture in our class who's often a minority in our society who will speak. That's nice because sometimes somebody like me doesn't bring it up because I don't think to … I need to know what language is appropriate or inappropriate to use. I need to learn about traditions in classrooms, or just cultural traditions *so in my classroom I might not offend somebody without intending to but, because I don't know, I may have.* (F422)

Whereas the contemporary version of colonialism would disavow the overt desire for dominant/subordinate roles, rather, in the present day, the other is required for the production of nostalgic and salvable benefit to the research participants. Their 'imperialist nostalgia' (Rosaldo, 1989) is offered as something positive, as proof that participants value and are conscious of those good things the indigenous other has to offer. Also gleaned from the Aboriginal presence is an increasingly expanded

white consciousness, a consciousness which will stop being only white, when, as in the quotation from F731 cited earlier, participants will achieve the 'increased ability to be diverse'. Participants construct a 'Native' persona in possession of a sense of self that participants can admire and desire; the embodied existence of the Aboriginal professor is irrelevant in comparison to this idealised version. Participants desire and create an ideal 'Native' identity which will possess a strong sense of self that can be roundly admired and imitated. Desiring this wholeness for themselves, participants appropriate, what is in effect, a simulacrum, their own fantasy.

The historical exploitation of the other that was originally rooted mainly in economic gain has been modified to become a longing for a spiritual or psychic wholeness, a process of 'eating the other' (hooks, 1992). Participants' desire is for things native, such as a spiritual awareness or connections that will assuage feelings of deprivation and loss felt by white participants (as in the quotation from F814, cited earlier: 'Natives have a very rich heritage and I really feel like I missed out on that'). Ward Churchill (1994) describes this desire of white people as a process for forgetting and denying the privileges that follow from colonisation. Desiring the other is a way of dissociating from the revulsion of genocide and colonisation and feeling good about oneself in the process. Discussions of multicultural issues will help participants do the right thing, as in the quotation of F422, cited earlier, that is, 'not offend somebody'. Participants also reason, that with guidance from an Aboriginal presence, the Aboriginal view of the world will be less mysterious; and participants who identify their greatest hunger as intellectual curiosity will be sated (F731, cited earlier: 'We end up with increased ability to be diverse'). Their taste for the exotic will not be satisfied by just any culture, however. One participant declares:

> so I've had lots of experience with Native people, some experience with French people. But I don't, I've never really considered [French culture] that different from my own culture so I'm not really that interested in it. (F665)

Participants' desire is revealed in what the 'Native' informant is expected to do and be. The desire also reveals that the privileged may remain ignorant of those with whom they are in unequal daily relationships; and then ask the other to guide them through a landscape which, for the privileged, remains exotic and uncharted. The participants remain the explorers in search of a culture or a people of whom they might approve and selectively appropriate.

Many participants have moments in which they express their need for the other; they also seem to recognise that they must disavow this need if they are to become self-defining agents. The methods for acquiring the things of the other follow from the colonial hangovers in which the 'Native' is on earth to satisfy the European. In muted but discernible ways, participants reveal their fantasies: the 'Native' identity is the one which can fulfil both psychic and material desires—even as participants simultaneously recoil from their desire and its objects. Psychic and social identifications of white Canadians continue to depend on the abject presence of Aboriginal peoples.

Reproducing White Teachers

Participants were asked to describe both their own qualities as teacher candidates and the qualities of good in-service teachers; the responses are not dissimilar. The overlap in lists is not merely a flattering self-estimate. The lists are an indication of participant constructions and expectations of teachers: idealised fantasies of normative identifications as white, straight, middle class and good. Participant conflict between desire for and fear of the other constructs an ideal self whose conflict is resolved in fantasy (Walkerdine, 1990). Participants identify traits or qualities which make them perfectly suited to this career to which they declare themselves inexorably drawn. They describe how their choice of teaching as a profession amounts to what could be described as a calling; the choosing is not available for questioning or debate. The role of teacher is idealised as supportive, loving, caring; participant access to this idealised character role is declared as natural:

it feels very right. (F085)

something that keeps pushing me toward education. (F332)

just part of something that's been in me. (F812)

I think [being a teacher is] something I always was anyway. (F023)

The decision to become a teacher has been called a natural process, but one that I suggest is 'natural' only if one considers the class, ethnic origins, race, gender, sexuality, education levels and several other social relations in which participants find themselves. While no participants declare that they view their entry into teaching as a chance to defend and disseminate the values of the dominant culture, many desire to teach children because they want to share with children their own positive educational experiences. These would-be teachers dream that they will engender children, love them and be loved reciprocally. It is a 'dream of love' (Robertson, 1994) that supports subjects' desire for legitimacy, authority and power 'that they might *properly embody* the desire to dominate' (pp. 7, 8). Finally, participants describe their entry into teaching as something which cannot easily be described, but which coincides with the quality of character and being a good person. While it is hardly surprising that participants cannot fully explain their desire for choosing teaching as a career, their assumptions about what teachers will do, who the students will be, and participants' suitability for the job suggest that public education is in no danger of disrupting its long-term effects of social reproduction. The space that the participants claim—that of middle-class, objective, non-political, educated, individualistic, self-determining agents—is an idealised image of acting subjects who are the source of meaning, knowledge and action. Participants perform their teacher identities by depicting themselves as part of the absent white centre and as part of domination. In their allegiance to white values, their claims on whiteness and their interest in reproducing it, participants are able to 'demonstrate' their suitability as teachers.

Technologies of Whiteness

Lipsitz (1995) describes what he calls the 'possessive investment in whiteness' created for the benefit of European settlers in North America as well as for their present-day descendants. By material practices and deliberate political activity, this investment has pervaded public policy and inscribed systemic racism within social democratic structures. The possessive investment in whiteness, like Cheryl Harris's (1993) depiction of whiteness as property, depends on white solidarity on issues of economic advantages, the denigration of affirmative action, selective history of colonisation, nation-building, and property rights. This sense of entitlement is made possible through everyday practices, forms of consciousness, representation and signification (Roman, 1997). In the discourse of research participants, for example, expressions of white entitlement and superiority are evident in participants' surprise and annoyance that through the cross-cultural course they came to experience feelings of guilt. They are indignant that their guilt comes from their being white, and they suggest that such associations between skin colour and complicity are statements of discrimination based on racialisation. This attempted escape to a non-racialised, neutral space of no colour is impossible, of course, as the neutral space is already defined as the white corner. In this neutral, blameless corner, however, white participants can assume that entitlement is their rightful claim.

The greatest contradiction for participants and the greatest disruption to their sense of social order is that the privileging of whiteness is being attacked, when all along, they have been able to call upon the investment in their whiteness as their underlying defence. This participant is doubly indignant:

> Many students felt that they were being persecuted through the course content because of, you know, simply by *virtue of them being white* and, you know, there's validity to what they say. ... You know, I've often felt myself that why simply by *virtue of being male*, why do I have to pay retribution? Why do I have to pay for these past injustices? And that's the defensive shell that you get into whenever you find yourself being attacked. (M7911–12)

The participant takes umbrage with the suggestion that his offence is in being both white and male, two identities that he has experienced as sure signs of entitlement and privilege. The immanent critique of the cross-cultural experience has not only been a contradiction of redemption discourses for this participant, but it is also a contradiction in that the causes of his offence—the participant's whiteness and maleness—are characteristics he typically experiences as virtues. He has a great deal at stake in the loss of privilege and attempts to protect it as one would protect one's property and investment, especially if it were tied to future gain such as rights and privileges and their attendant claim on personhood.

The 'possessive investment in whiteness' raises another question for an imagined white community in which whiteness is experienced differently across various identifications. Throughout the research, I observed the construction of various shades of whiteness, premised on distinctions of class, ethnic background, personal

experiences, public and private histories, liberal attitudes, education, gender, sexual orientation and other associations that can be constructed in socially redeeming ways. The possessive investment in whiteness is, after all, an investment and, as such, involves some risks. Some research participants understand very well that the shifting nature of their dominant identifications are not necessarily attached to an investment that is secure.

In one striking example of this insecurity, a participant anxiously anticipates a situation in which her racial dominance is not an asset. She resists efforts by Aboriginal leaders to provide their children with Aboriginal teachers when it means that she will be out of a job. The participant claims that this attempt on the part of Aboriginal leaders is idealistic, that is, not rational. She is in a dilemma of concern for Aboriginal peoples as she simultaneously wonders about the use of her own qualifications and sympathies. The loss of identity control on her part has material consequences as well as other effects for her:

> in an *ideal world*, all the Native people would be taught by Native people, but this isn't going to happen and if it happens, it's not going to be for a long time, so why not try to educate me as much as you can on what you would like to see happening … in an *ideal world* you could say, well you know there's no place for white people in Native, to teach Native kids because we want Native people teaching Native kids, but *idealistically* I mean that's not the way it's going to go. *Realistically* that's just not the way it is. (F6613)

Throughout her interview, the participant has indicated her history of enrolling in several Native Studies courses and her appreciation of Aboriginal issues beyond the level generally found among her cohort. She has a great desire to teach Aboriginal children. She also understands initiatives to redress the numerical imbalance between Aboriginal and white teachers by educating and hiring Aboriginal teachers. White people in Canada are generally unaware of instances in which they may be rejected because of their whiteness and find their rejection especially unfair if, like the participant, they have made some effort to make themselves knowledgeable about race issues. Even though no job applications have yet been sent or no rejection slips received, the participant's sense of entitlement is doubly rebuffed. She is surprised to run up against 'a lot of roadblocks', especially because she has tried to be the exception among white people in her effort to develop a non-racist image beyond what is typical. In her attempt to claim a separate, distinguishing identity, the participant is also surprised to discover a rare occasion when 'good intentions' and white identity are not privileged.

This particular participant, through her own reading and not inconsiderable studying, has come to the realisation that the boundaries of identity are not secure. From other parts of her interview, it is clear that while she might welcome this ambiguity, it also represents the 'encroachment of the other'; she indicates repeatedly that her own identity is undermined, not to mention her confidence in claiming the place where she will 'fit in'. The white participant is caught in the dilemma of supporting the efforts of Aboriginal achievement in formal educational processes

and at the same time observing the erosion of a fixed positionality for Aboriginal identity as the one cared for (Noddings, 1984). White identity is undermined by Aboriginal peoples acting as agents in control of their own education as well as by the lack of permanence in the Aboriginal image as one in need. This erosion of positionality has implications for the ones who produce themselves as the caregivers.

Fanon (1963) says that decolonisation, represented in this research by initiatives in Aboriginal staffing, is a terrifying experience for the colonisers/settlers, who owe the very fact of their existence to the colonial system (p. 36). Fanon anticipates the colonialists' (and participants') reaction to learning that Aboriginal peoples intend to staff their own schools with their own teachers; it is the colonialists' worst nightmare: 'They want to take our place' (p. 39). Fanon describes the terror initiated by colonised people when they perform perfectly those functions which the dominant group imagines it performs as distinguishing features of its dominance. It is not simply one's redundancy as a group which appals, or as in the preceding case, missing out on a job. Rather, what is shocking is the discovery that dominance is neither innate nor an automatic entitlement; and further, that racial superiority is a social construction dependent upon those whom one has named other.

Ironically, the disavowal of otherness, the 'investment in whiteness', and the desire for certainties all serve to limit one's understanding of a self and others. Participants' desire for certainties and their attempts to achieve it by ignoring otherness limit the identity of who a teacher may become. In teaching jurisdictions where the production of whiteness is much desired, the denial of otherness necessarily limits teachers' ability to see and value the otherness in themselves and their students. The certainty of such identifications ignores all beyond normative constructions. In describing Queer Theory, Britzman (1995) says that ignorance is an effect and the limit of knowledge. Further, resistance to knowledge is 'not outside of the subjects of knowledge or the knowledge of subjects, but rather as *constitutive of knowledge and its subjects* (p. 154, emphasis added). Resistance to knowledge is accomplished by projecting otherness and disavowing it in the self; resistance is thereby reiterated in the construction of the self and knowledge.

Students gain control of the technologies of racialisation by merging them with students' professional interests. By means of their formalised teacher education process, participants have been given official access to a specific way of describing racial differences—in terms of children's education—and of affirming their teacher identities by using professional talk. That they can talk about race in this fashion is an illustration and exercise of their power as teacher candidates. The discourse normalises participants' talk as the language of teachers, and renders their expressions and interests morally acceptable. Now that racialisation has become a concern that is germane to their consciousness as professional teachers, it is an area of knowledge they can authoritatively discuss. This new legitimacy also constructs the self-examination of their desires as an effect of their good intentions and pastoral concern. Managing this knowledge (and this talk) is one of the processes for maintaining a dominant white self.

Participants also possess technologies with which to judge the sufficiency of another's awareness and the ability to know a racist act when they see one.

Acquiring this discourse gives the new pastoral elite a useful technology for discerning the particular failings of their peers. They understand that technologies of control must be applied both to others and to themselves in the form of self-surveillance. This need to create boundaries for the construction and containment of identities partly explains the enormous interest education students have in acquiring teaching strategies as a way of controlling bodies—both their students' bodies and their own—as well as the limits of their own obligation. The research indicates that participants are constantly at work to police the borders of identity, constantly involved in self-surveillance to see that they are producing themselves as respectable, and acceptable, white, teacher bodies.

Claiming Respectability

Note that, as stated at the beginning of this article, the purpose is not to search student discourses for readily available and easy-to-observe racist remarks, but rather, the research examines procedures and processes of liberal discourse by which white racialised positioning is evaluated, justified and performed. To that end, seemingly supportive, sympathetic remarks on the part of participants are not referenced in this section as if the remarks are ironic or as if the participants are insincere. Indeed, the seemingly contradictory remarks of participants—positive and negative—are understood as some indication of the always-in-process nature of identity construction. Therefore, race-positive remarks are as useful as all others in illustrating what it is that participants are interested in accomplishing with respect to the parameters of this research. Participants are interested in affirming their subject positions as qualified teachers whose liberal goodness includes being non-prejudiced. There is no attempt in this analysis to undermine or question whether this in an 'appropriate' interest on the part of would-be teachers. Neither do I mean to 'suspect' the sincerity of participants' intentions. Rather, the following section continues to illustrate and examine processes by which 'good intentions' may be produced in this historical and geographical context. How can claims on dominant identities—as produced by participants' interests and intentions—continue to be 'communicated as "fact" and empowered as "truth"' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 59)?

In ways which avoid examining and undermining their own subject positionings, participants move from encountering the other to becoming advocates, teachers and knowers. Participants use their knowledge of 'correct behaviour' to inform their surveillance of the actions of other pre-service teachers whom they presume are less knowledgeable. Participants secure their distance from the other, first, by establishing themselves as the superior helpers and guides to Aboriginal peoples, and second, by separating themselves from other white people who are uninformed and unsympathetic to cross-cultural issues:

> How angry I got at these other [students in my class] really surprised me, and the attitudes *out there* really surprised me. But then I thought, well this is good for me to know. … sometimes my own being a bit naive is bad,

because I don't think it that way, and I don't think other people think that way, so it surprises me when it happens. (F086)

I can't talk with people that are ignorant basically, so people that *fit in* with me definitely are not ignorant. They're usually caring like I am, really worried about where things are going in our society. (F6611)

Research participants understand that racist whites are threatening to their own white self-image, which depends on its whiteness by securing an identity as a non-racist, white liberal; especially threatening are those white people who are overtly racist or who do not have an appreciation of Aboriginal culture like the appreciation the participants claim to have. Participants' greater fear is for what white racists say, for their unenlightened, unmitigated racism; participants doubt they can silence them (F66). Participants establish differences between themselves and their student colleagues by citing the others' negative reactions and by declaring their own positive responses:

I appreciated [the cross-cultural course] and I thought it was good. But some of the other students were starting to complain. 'Why is this being shoved in our face all the time?' (F083)

Participants need to separate themselves from these scenes of innocence lost because of the ease and potential with which participants might access their own racism. Because participants' self-image is based on the construction of their identities as non-racist, innocent helpers, the possibility that this construction might not be true is the shadow that they are keen to deny. The fear in the shadows is our own racism. The shadow, the abject self that must always be denied, is the knowledge of our racist selves. This is the vagueness and disavowal of what participants say they 'need to know' or 'be aware of' as a result of their cross-cultural course. This is the knowledge which participants are afraid to know and continually resist. It is with this insider knowledge of how racism 'works' that they evaluate their classmates' remarks as racist and untenable. Participants understand that their white identities are linked to their claims of innocence; they also understand that they have a great deal at stake if they lose these claims: control over privilege, history, job opportunities, a good name, positive teacher image, and the power of self-definition.

Disenfranchised white classes are not necessarily defenders of others who are disenfranchised by race (Roediger, 1991; Weis *et al.*, 1997). Desire for respectable citizen status confirms that the vertical alliance with white skin privilege that is available to participants has more appeal than any horizontal solidarity with the 'other' across ethnic or class lines. As the security of white identities is dependent upon participants' construction of themselves as 'not-Other', white ethnic minorities claim entitlement by moving closer to the centre of white norms and values and by claiming a 'toehold on respectability' (Fellows & Razack, 1998) by means of 'dominance through difference' (p. 341).

If they lose their moral correctitude, participants' 'toehold on respectability' is liable to a slip that would otherwise confuse them with those whose whiteness comes in shades of grey. Described in various ways by participants, this less-than-

respectable, off-white shading is characterised as working-class, of lower education levels, red-neck, homophobic, non-liberal, parochial. Participants, in contrast, warrant their positions as knowledgeable, sympathetic insiders by distancing themselves from those white people who will not be disciplined. The effort which goes into securing white identities and spaces attests to the 'elasticity' of subject locations (Agnew, 1993) and contradicts secure ideological frames of reference surrounding subject identities. By discrediting the actions of others and generally separating themselves from white identified individuals who are overtly racist, participants secure 'very white' identifications. There is a great deal at stake in losing access to these identities. In describing the illiberal reactions of others, however, participants demonstrate their insider knowledge of how whiteness is performed and, more importantly, what this identification must deny if it is to secure things as they are.

Beyond Closing Down: supporting resistance and trauma

As those who have been teaching oppositional pedagogy are well aware, the resistance can be strong and very discouraging. Worse, the possibility exists that sexist, homophobic and racist discourses have been aided and abetted by such courses—especially when they are compulsory, as in the case of this research. That many students do gain a sense of their contingent, dependent identity constructions, however, is also possible and indeed an effect for many students. In the 'messy contingency' of my most recent teaching experience, I observed, along with their resistance, the halting, ambiguous and interested learning of my students. Despairing that no one ever learns is an excuse to give up too easily and a luxury available mainly to dominant white folk. As a white woman, it would also be disingenuous on my part to separate myself from my white students when my own learning is always halting and contingent, and frequently disorienting and uncomfortable. Some of the importance of this research that points out the difficulty of anti-racist pedagogy comes together in this statement by Felman & Laub (1992):

> if teaching does not hit upon some sort of crisis, if it does not encounter either the vulnerability or the explosiveness of (an explicit or implicit) critical and unpredictable dimension, it has perhaps *not truly taught.* (p. 53)

The enormous trauma and dissonance produced in this particular cross-cultural setting is not unusual, as numerous examples of resistance can attest; nor, do some suggest, could learning be otherwise. In contrast, teachers and students are produced in ways which attempt to reduce the uncertainties of the classroom by effectively terminating the 'interminable task' (Felman, 1987). It is in this desire for stable identities and limits on which knowledge will be allowed that oppositional knowledges meet with resistance.

Cameron McCarthy (1994) notes that one form of resisting the challenge of transformative themes is to absorb them into the dominant culture where they are 'quietly rearticulated into just another reformist set of discourses … and appropriated by a dominant humanism' (p. 82). In this way, the actual implementation of oppositional emancipatory education among education faculties 'has been effectively

deferred' (p. 83). For example, the desire to know the other also works as an anti-conquest narrative whereby gaining knowledge of the other is an updated version of the colonisation process of possessing the other. The 'desire to ignore' is not about a 'lack of information: it is an active dynamic of negation, an active refusal of information' (Felman, 1987, p. 79). Unfortunately, the conserving nature of schooling practices can easily be an obstruction to learning. Therefore, multicultural educational programmes which emphasise attitude adjustment and prejudice management are not simply inadequate. Interventionist programmes are unwittingly dangerous and may even succeed in reproducing racism when they do not take seriously students' desires for secure subject identifications (Worth, 1993; Ellsworth, 1997) and their desires to 'terminate the interminable' (Felman, 1987).

This research, which is ultimately about processes of pedagogy, is *not* about developing 'more efficient transmission strategies' (Lather, 1991, p. 143). Rather, it is to help us learn, as students and teachers:

> to analyze the discourses available to us, which ones we are invested in, how we are inscribed by the dominant, how we are outside of, other than the dominant, consciously/unconsciously, always partially, contradictorily. (Lather, 1991, p. 143)

Participants hold their subject positions, as contradictory as they may be, because they need them; these identifications, however the participants negotiate them, are necessary for the participant's psychic survival (Lather, 1991). Lather suggests that an appropriate pedagogy is not a matter of disturbing participants' self-satisfaction or wrenching from them their certain knowledge. Rather, it is those places of uncertainty, dissatisfactions, doubts—where identities are not secure—which are the places where possibilities for exploration and change reside. Participants' fantasies and racist remarks also indicate their own struggles against aggression—historical, economic, present, latent, manifest. Walkerdine (1990) similarly advocates this approach of looking at subject fantasies as spaces 'for hope and for escape from oppression' (p. 200).

The need to defend oneself against the charge of racism, for example, may be required if one is to maintain a fantasy as protector of the underdog which liberal whiteness requires. The contradiction between the desire both to dominate as well as protect the other, however, may be cause for anxiety and for the continual need to support—or iterate—the fantasy of the empathic self, hence the participants' continual flight toward innocence. '[D]esire is not a neutral term' (Todd, 1997, p. 239), shaped as it is by social contexts in which some of participants' competing desires can be described as 'sexist, racist, classist, or heterosexist'. Fortunately, these are not the extent or limit of participant desires, and desires to be 'good students' can also support participants as they risk their comfort beyond what they are afraid to know. It is not always and only rage and aggression that results from the processes of testifying and witnessing to changes in oneself and others; neither are participants' reactions uniform in this regard. Therefore, in the midst of participants' desires for self-preservation and wholeness, I am struck by the potential for their desires to become a source of something positive.

The question remains, how can fantasy and desire be addressed to present different outcomes? Can we come to know our own desires and fantasies and use them as sources of hope? I suggest that in the midst of ambiguity and contradiction, participants' desires for goodness and self-presentation are also the site for re-evaluating possibilities for change and for asking 'what does "good" look like now?' This is not the same as relying on the generosity or benevolence of participants, but connects with their own self-interest to re-examine and engage in what the desire for wholeness might look like after meeting oneself as an ambiguous and always-in-formation subject identity.

Felman & Laub (1992) wonder, 'Can the process of the testimony—that of bearing witness to a crisis or a trauma—be made use of in the classroom situation?' Teaching as both a performative as well as a cognitive event is like psychoanalysis 'insofar as both [teaching and psychoanalysis] strive to produce, and to enable, *change*' (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 53, emphasis added). In a description of the subject, Belsey (1980) says that it is:

> perpetually in the process of construction, thrown into crisis by alterations in language and in the social formation, capable of change. And in the fact that the subject is a *process* lies the possibility of transformation. (p. 50)

That is why a process which is inherently capable of supporting change—at the level of subjectivity and discursive formation—is most significant. Consider, for example, how the failure to fortify the subjectivity and social norms of heterosexual, white, abled, male hegemony could be useful as a site of agency. It is the subject, lacking a unified identity and always in process, which 'supports the possibility of deliberate change' (Belsey, 1980, p. 66).

I suggest that the recognition of students' trauma is important to their learning; and, of course, many teachers provide this recognition instinctively, if only out of necessity for the smooth continuation of a class. Felman says that a teacher's bearing witness to students' trauma addresses it as the serious event that it is. This process avoids foreclosing on the crisis and, instead, provides some way of interpreting and reintegrating the crisis of identity into a form that has meaning. Of course, recognising the contingencies of identity production is not a solution in itself, but it does support the thinking about how to 'live with rather than foreclose contradictory impulses' (Flax, 1993, p. 29), just as it lends support against the disillusionment that change is impossible.

Working towards the opening of pedagogical discourses, in some ways, would seem to be profoundly anti-educational, going as it does against the possibility of certain knowledge. This desire for certainty, however, is itself problematic in its attempt to 'fix the unfixable' (Flax, 1993, p. 25). Truth and certainty are very seductive qualities for the participants of this research as well as for mainstream educational institutions, for it is by these securities that their innocence is guaranteed and their accountability fulfilled. I volunteer that these participants are not alone in the seduction of their desire for certainties. Flax concludes, 'It is extremely difficult for us to accept and live such unstable and painful ambivalence. However,

these junctures are exactly where responsibility beyond innocence looms as a promise and a frightening necessity' (1993, p. 147).

It would seem necessary, then, for the student and instructor alike to set aside a collective wish that innocent and universal positions are possible and desirable. For those who identify with a white Western culture, Flax says that some of the tragedies of modern European cultures should compel us to 'suspect ourselves' and the place of dominance based on an essential goodness. In the words of Flax, 'Neither the great refusal nor absolute hope will help us cope with the messy contingency of everyday life' (1993, p. 32). The 'messy contingencies' are necessary parts of this very difficult and often painful learning of knowledge that is not in charge of itself, that cannot claim 'heroic' status (Lather, 1995). The coming to knowledge of self and other is not a 'victory narrative' but one that may be characterised by hysterical responses and disavowal, by events which frequently disrupt the lives of students, teachers and the institutions which would move to contain them. Hope also arises, however, in the possibility that education projects should also be able to discuss the 'ruins of knowledge' as well as the heroics.

The illusory fantasy of changing the world at will is not an option. The loss of faith in the ability of rational debate to promote change, however, might be tempered by what Kobena Mercer (1997) calls 'responsible disillusionment'. This is a position that is supportive of possibilities and is different from cynicism that is all too readily available as a product of despair. Cynicism presumes an all or nothing approach and eventually ends in withdrawal from a situation which seems intractable. 'Responsible disillusionment' is a possibility for coping with the 'messy contingency' of knowing that people in dominant social positions doing oppositional pedagogy are not going to save the world, but neither should we stop trying to do what is necessary to try, including no longer telling victory narratives with our (dominant) selves at the centre. It is necessary to accept the challenge that Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) describes: '*to leave the field or point out the contradiction*' (p. 264, original emphasis).

Processes of identity construction whose nature is change, wherein deliberate change is a possibility, invite us to keep asking questions, to live with ambiguity, to understand one's desire for goodness and to explore new possibilities for simultaneously producing and undoing 'goodness'. The importance of this, as Butler suggests, is so that we might explore possibilities for expanding 'the very meaning of what counts as a valued and valuable body in the world' (Butler, 1993, p. 22).

Acknowledgement

Notes

[1]   Throughout the research, I do not refer to participants by name or take much care to distinguish them individually; in many ways, what they say is not attributable to certain individuals but is owned by communities of speakers. In this regard, their language is unexceptional. However much the liberal racism reported in this article is peculiar to white

Canadian students, it would be inappropriate to explain it away as merely a product of their particular context. It is the utter unexceptionality of the remarks that I am interested in observing.

[2]   The use of a singular term to identify indigenous peoples in Canada is fraught with difficulty considering the wide range of legal, geographical, political and cultural differences by which people define themselves. Two terms frequently used by both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, as well as participants in this study, include 'Native' and 'Indian' in spite of ambiguous references and colonial connotations. As used in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, the term 'Aboriginal' (as noun or adjective) is the over-arching term used when referring to indigenous peoples in Canada in legal, political, social and economic transactions. The *Constitution Act, 1982* is significant historically and politically; in this Act, existing treaty rights of Aboriginal peoples are recognised and affirmed. For this article, I use the term 'Aboriginal', which is commonly used by indigenous communities at this geographic location.

[3]   The inculcation of and desire for a whiter shade of whiteness is not only historic, of course, as my personal experience attests. Growing up in a Canadian prairie city, I was frequently admonished by my family to 'act like a lady'. Never, however, did I have to be told to 'act white' because 'being a lady' already embodied what it meant to be white, straight, able-bodied, gendered, a Christian, and all other identifications that were considered normative, respectable and 'proper' in my family of origin. I was made to know, unconsciously at least, that through a particular production of white, female heternormativity, access to white, middle-class respectability was possible, even for a working-class, second generation, non-Anglo family like mine.

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