

Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis

ISSN: 2325-1204. Journal homepage: <https://www.iastatedigitalpress.com/jctp/>

Volume 2, Issue 2, 2014, Article 2, <https://doi.org/10.31274/jctp-180810-21>

Teach With Me: The Promise of a Raced Politic for Social Justice in College Classrooms

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Abstract

This article considers the importance of a “raced politic” and students of color when teaching in predominantly White college classrooms. It highlights the ways unchallenged White supremacy limits socially-just practice. The author also discusses the ways student of color voices can serve as a pedagogical tool. Finally, drawing on the work of Freire (1970), the article offers a conceptual framework for understanding and promoting student of color voices in the work of social justice.

Recommended Citation

Edwards, K. T. (2014). Teach With Me: The Promise of a Raced Politic for Social Justice in College Classrooms. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis*, 2(2), 18-29. <https://doi.org/10.31274/jctp-180810-21>

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Shifts, Movements, and Recognitions

Labels

For some time now I have found myself preoccupied with the role of identity in classroom interactions. As not only a researcher and scholar, but also as an everyday theorist, I constantly muse over the decisions students and teachers make in regards to sociocultural, intellectual, and professional identity expression. Questions related to who we want or choose to be in the pedagogical moment run through my mind? I am fascinated with the intersections; the ways the individuation of social context push, pull, and press against each other in the microcosm of the university seminar. This preoccupation is inextricably linked to the many identities that compose who I am. So, who am I? Moreover, “Who am I in the academy?” Primarily, I am a critical scholar (Adorno, 1991; Marx & Engels, 2005; Rasmussen, 1996), who studies philosophies of higher education and college curriculum (Bess & Webster, 1999). I am a womanist and a Black feminist (Cannon, 1995; Mitchem, 2002; Walker, 1983). I incorporate critical race theory, anti-colonial methodologies, autobiographical theorizing, and the like in my scholarship. In this regard my vision for teaching, research, and service is always liberatory (Freire, 1970). I try to make these intentions clear in my academic and non-academic life. I am a critical scholar of color in a White academy.

As a woman of color who has earned a doctorate and writes about issues of equity and justice, particularly in reference to race, class, and gender, I surprisingly look great on paper. I have heard from colleagues that my work is “sexy!” They mean my work is challenging and racy (race-y). But the more I think about this adjective, “sexy,” as a descriptor for my life’s work, which is primarily situated within a “white capitalist patriarchal hegemon[ic]” academy (Giardina & McCarthy, 2008, p. 114) the more I recognize its profound truth.

My scholarship is merely sexy in an institution undergirded by White male supremacy and patriarchy. It is stimulating, and alluring, inciting arousal and pleasurable recreation. It is not substantive, significant, or necessary to what is done here; only auxiliary and marginal. Like Fasching-Varner (2009) claimed, my scholarly work on “race and racism remain fictionalized, untrue, and quasi-literary in the imagination of readers, particularly white readers. In this sense whites never take responsibility or action for racist behavior, belief, and treatments of whole groups of people” (p. 816). Instead of a platform for substantive change, I provide the White academy that little bit of requisite “cut-up” (Austin, 1995, p. 434), or discursive disruption. My work is provocative and offers the necessary edge to keep the intelligentsia publically relevant (Franco, 1994). The intelligentsia or White intellectual establishment publicly supports, privately contains/controls, counter-hegemonic discourse, while simultaneously perpetuating a common

habitus of enslavement. What does this look like in the day to day life of a Black woman professor? It means I am more than welcome in my university's diversity report. My Black gendered (read woman) and classed body, and my autobiographical work are interesting and add creditability to their claims of equity. It also means the university does not have to make any substantive strides towards responding to on-going issues of access, privilege, relevance, and cultural competency (Austin, 1995; Fasching-Varner, 2009). Every day I realize more and more just how "sexy" I am.

Class is now in session

My shallow, non-substantive, sexy academic existence is nowhere more apparent than in the classroom. While some university administrators and White colleagues may be intrigued by my marginal(ized) and intersectional scholarship, or at least begrudgingly find my radical presence a necessary evil for the maintenance of "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 1999, p. 27), many of my White students are not buying it. Instead, they find my rhetorical pursuit of equity and justice on college campuses laborious. This is the ultimate and ugly result of a sexy existence:

[W]e must be attentive to the seductive absorption of black women's voices in classrooms of higher education where black women's texts are still much more welcomed than black women ourselves. Giving the illusion of change, this strategy of symbolic inclusion masks how the everyday institutional policies and arrangements that suppress and exclude African Americans as a collectivity remain virtually untouched. (Hill-Collins, 1996, p. 9)

Unfortunately, I believed the "illusion of change." As a doctoral student attending scholarly conferences, discussing my work with other critical scholars or *wanna-be* (seen as) critical scholars, or while reading the kinds of literature that strengthen a critical consciousness, I was able to convince myself that my work was valuable, appreciated, and important. I found myself surrounded by people who supported my scholarship, valued my contributions, and encouraged my efforts. I was convinced that I was part of the contemporary revolution. Sometimes I can still convince myself. However, recently I have found it much more difficult to conjure up the illusion, because as soon as I stepped into the predominantly White classroom as a critical Black woman teacher it was shattered.

When I began teaching courses on critical topics in higher education the ugly truth surfaced immediately. As a new teacher, committed to socially-just dialogue, I cluttered my syllabus with rich, challenging, provocative readings. I intentionally offered questions and case studies that pushed my students to analyze the systemic character of power, privilege, and

supremacy and their manifestations in universities as well as the larger society. I also encouraged them to question the ways they either supported or resisted these unjust systems. And as much as I loved the weekly intellectual engagement and the pride I felt in influencing curriculum for social change, I also labored beyond what I ever could have imagined. It was hard! White students, particularly White men, seemed to resent me. Oftentimes, they would sit in their seats in stubborn silence, refusing to participate in the class discussion. No matter how much I worked to create an equitable environment, a safe space, where we could thoughtfully engage these ideas, some of my students adamantly refused.

It was here in this pedagogical space that I came face to face with the limits of social justice work. It was in the classroom where I finally recognized the implications of surface-level diversity agendas. I received my first real lesson as a Black woman teaching in a predominantly White institution. I learned that despite all of the rhetoric in support of my presence, the silent voices are clear: I definitely “don’t belong here” (Baszile, 2006, p. 196).

Pedagogical Sites

Shifting Subjective Locales

To be fair, in hindsight, my early college teaching experiences were tolerable. In fact in the midst of great struggle there were some real moments of connection and learning. Admittedly, I looked forward to class every week. It was difficult and a reality-check, but for the most part still enjoyable. This sentiment would drastically change when I moved to another predominantly White university. As a new professor I knew there would be an adjustment period. As a Black woman, who had experience teaching in predominantly White classrooms, I also thought I was prepared for the more common issues that arise from such a subject position. I was wrong.

This new university was my former difficult classroom experiences multiplied! I found engaging issues of equity and justice almost impossible. The antagonism was all too real. What I was also unprepared for was the frequency with which the White men students attempted to undermine my position as professor in the classroom. This was a particular challenge for me because I worked so hard to maintain a commitment to equity and mutual respect (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Clandinin, 2005). I struggled with balancing my use of positional power (undergirded by White male supremacy) in the classroom, with the pedagogical need for hands-on facilitation of learning and engagement for productive dialogue (Mitchell & Edwards, 2010). I was angry, frustrated, frightened, and I felt like a failure. None of my pedagogical techniques worked. I was alone and confused with little

direction on how to respond to this difficult new place. Sadly, I no longer looked forward to class.

One day after several weeks of emotional, intellectual, and professional turmoil, I confided in a Black colleague and friend. I explained to him my frustrations and feelings of failure. During my escalating rant, I also mentioned my disappointment in my students of color. This was the first time I had openly acknowledged the negative feelings I also held towards them. I felt, at some level, the students of color had abandoned me. I believed they should also be invested in critical conversations in the classroom as the implications were of particular importance for them. In my opinion, the students of color should have had a vested interest in the dismantling of White supremacy and the promotion of equity and socially-just practices at the university and beyond. Instead, this less than a handful of students remained largely silent during these discussions, and sometimes, when they did speak, actually supported their ill-informed White classmates' racist, sexist, homophobic, classists, and all around unjust commentary.

Particularized Insights

When I concluded my impassioned declamation, released my pent-up frustration, my colleague told me quite matter-of-factly, "The whiteness is thick here." It took me a while to process what he was saying. Within a few moments it began to make sense to me. I had always considered White supremacy a monolithic, unilateral, evil. White supremacy just is. It is cultural, global, and systemic, and it has implications for every aspect of our lives. However, what I had not considered was the varying levels of its pervasiveness in the lives of students of color in different locales. What I also had not considered was the influence a collective Black politic (or raced politic) had on the degree to which White supremacy manifested (Mack, 2012). Do not misunderstand. I realized individuals' experiences with racism were complicated by location. I understood that I may be afforded the luxury of political correctness in Connecticut that may not be offered in Mississippi. Nevertheless, what I did not expect was a space where the belief in the superiority of a White cultural, socio-political identity could exist unchecked, unmitigated, and fundamentally absolute.

I am a southern woman; a Deep South woman. I am intimately familiar with racism, racial antagonism, colorism, and the like. What I am unfamiliar with is a complete absence of a Black politic. When I use the term "Black politic," this is a personal definition, informed by several scholars (Akbar, 1989; Brookins, 1994; Cokley, 2005) that helps me delineate between multiple White spaces as I understand them now. For me, a Black politic is an adherence to a healthy, positive valuation of an African-descended identity. It is the recognition of the ways

White supremacy undermines the richness of Black culture and community, and a commitment to responding to the material circumstances that manifest under White supremacy. In this new predominantly White space, a Black politic was largely absent.

Alternatively, my first institution had a small, underrepresented, yet thriving Black community that possessed a strong Black politic. Black students along with faculty and staff were constantly engaging in programming and activities to raise awareness about issues of concern to Black members of the academic community. There were opportunities for Black students to commune and support each other. Important yearly markers such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Black History Month were always recognized and celebrated campus-wide, with high publicity and student involvement. In fact, these events were often student-led and organized. Also, there were specific physical spaces on campus that were “Black spaces,” spaces where Black students could find solace and reprieve and commune with others of like mind and spirit. Most importantly, when issues of blatant injustice were recognized, there was a solid cohort of Black students to respond in protest. The students at my former institution were vocal, active, supportive, and socio-politically Black.

I did not find that to be the case at my new institution. All the markers of a vibrant Black politic, or any raced politic was largely absent here. At the micro-level, Black students did not seem to form any kind of strategic collective to support each other. On a more macro-level, there was no evidence of a Black consciousness campus-wide. This institution did not have any type of highly-visible activity or volunteer opportunities officially in place to commemorate MLK Day. There was also no program of events in February to celebrate Black History Month. These are simply the obvious absences and silences. Not that the recognition of MLK Day or Black History Month makes a campus equitable and accessible. In fact, I would argue that my former institution as a whole significantly struggles with issues of justice and equity. In a lot of ways my former institution is an immensely racist space. But in the midst of that racism (and sexism, and homophobia, and classism) is a space of resistance. I did not find a similar resistant space at my new institution. Now as a new faculty member, I may concede that I might have overlooked these types of activities taking place on campus. Yet, I would argue that if the efforts were significant then they would not have been so difficult to locate. Probably more importantly, my students also should not have difficulty locating university-sponsored opportunities for cultural expression.

Student of Color Voice, Counter-Narrative, and My Pedagogical Knapsack

As I proceeded to conceptually unravel what it meant to teach in thick whiteness, I also began to recognize the beauty of my first predominantly White experience: Black student voice.

While both universities are predominantly White institutions (PWI), at my former institution I could depend on the Black students to offer a critical read and a resistant analysis. I knew that the Black students would provide counter-narratives informed by the experiences of a Black subjectivity in a White supremacist culture in response to the master narratives undergirded by injustice proposed by their White counterparts. As part of my pedagogical engagement, I could trust that unsubstantiated ideologies that disenfranchise would not go unchallenged. I could trust that if I were to assign a reading that discussed the challenges people living in poverty encounter attempting to access higher education, when one of the White men decided to use the example of the “Black welfare queen” to argue that it is not an issue of access but “personal responsibility” that there would be a Black student ready and willing to offer a real life testimonial attesting to the fact that all of his imagined understandings of Black poverty were flawed and false.

These types of expected classroom relationships altered my practice without me recognizing it. What I had not realized was that I learned to use my Black students’ (and other students’ of color) voices as pedagogical resources. Part of my use of their lives as text (Baszile, 2008; Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008) meant that I developed the practice of limiting my own voice. Integrated in my emerging pedagogical praxis was the concept of trust. I trusted that if I gave my students enough space in the classroom, they would challenge each other in productive ways. As a teacher, I found it more beneficial for my students’ learning if they struggled with each other. They interpreted those types of interactions as more equitable and safe. I interjected, primarily, to provide information, clarification, direction, and facilitation. When I did find it necessary to push an idea, I did it with great care, knowing that my students often interpreted the voicing of my ideals and commitments as a reprimand, if not in agreement with theirs.

I came to my most recent institution with this unconscious understanding of classroom practice. I realized fairly quickly that what I had known to be true previously was not true here. My pedagogical truth had changed. I watched students contribute to discussions with responses informed by their favorite Fox News pundit. I watched them display an almost illogical commitment to not understanding the impact difference could have on one’s life experiences. These seemingly bright, intelligent, for all accounts smart White students were trapped in their own worlds and the figments of their imaginations about Other people’s worlds (Minh-ha, 1989). This, however, was not the most disturbing revelation. I had taught racist, misguided White students before. When my students of color did not respond to these illogical and unjust attitudes is when I was left unawares. Further, the infrequent responses offered by

students of color were sometimes as shallow and unperceptive as their White colleagues. More disheartening still is the realization of how silenced, discarded, and epistemologically absent my students of color were at this new institution (Mack, 2012).

Sadly, as the semester carried on this revelation was confirmed. It was first confirmed when one of my students of color met with me after class in tears. She was distraught after hearing the hateful assumptions her White colleagues held about “people like” her. Not knowing her humble beginnings, assuming that all graduate students possessed middle-class sensibilities, the White students had implicitly labeled poor, uneducated communities of color as incompetent, incapable, and unmotivated. In her words, lacking the ability to “talk White,” and knowing that the way she verbally expressed herself would not be validated by her White colleagues, she expressed fear of voicing her truth in class. Moreover, she knew her emotional response would be discredited as irrational and subjective. I, of course, encouraged her to speak up in class and let her know I would support her. I reminded her that her voice was important and necessary. Fortunately, after that meeting, she spoke more. Unfortunately, her new found freedom was not contagious.

I soon realized my pedagogical knapsack was lacking. While through my previous teaching experiences I had learned to use restraint and patience in the classroom to meet more equitable and emancipatory aims, I had to now learn how to push important ideas without wielding unjust “teacher privilege” (Mitchell & Edwards, 2010). I had to figure out ways to maintain my commitment to modeling social justice, fairness, and a safe learning environment, while also strongly encouraging my students to engage in a critical consciousness and self-reflexivity (Freire, 1970). I have to admit, part of me was quite resistant to the pedagogical push. I had developed all of these personal ideals for the educative space; ideals about how learning could be mutually beneficial and supportive to all involved. Much of this commitment was related to the way I had interpreted my own experiences with formal education as a student. It had been a process that reflected the support of racism, patriarchy, and classism, which did not significantly change until I was a doctoral student. I was adamant that as a Black woman faculty member I would be committed to radically changing that space, or at least the space I occupied as teacher. To the extent possible, I would not reenact systems of injustice, even if those systems were now available to me, even if it made my job easier. I was committed to doing something different. And thankfully in my early career, my Black students’ voices helped make my vision possible.

A Path to Hope: Freire

While these shifts and movements in my teaching career have been difficult, they have also been the impetus for the development of a scholarly agenda. I am now more interested in the curricular import of student of color voices in predominantly White spaces. One theoretical avenue that has assisted me in considering this idea more thoughtfully is the work of Paulo Freire (1970). In particular I have found myself drawn to Freire's concepts of mutual humanity and oppression as inhumanity. I am beginning to question what the humanization of oppressors in relation to the oppressed looks like in the classroom.

Loving Relationships

Freire (1970) argued that the very act of hate and oppression dehumanizes the oppressor. The oppressed, because of their more human, yet historically dehumanized position, have a responsibility to bring humanity back to both themselves and their oppressors. He wrote:

Concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization, not only as an ontological possibility but as an historical reality. And as an individual perceives the extent of dehumanization, he or she may ask if humanization is a viable possibility. Within history ... both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of their incompleteness ... [However humanization] is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors ... which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, it is a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more fully human ... This struggle is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed ... [I]n seeking to regain their humanity [the oppressed cannot] become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both. This then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. (pp. 43-44, emphasis in original)

How do "student-teachers" and "teacher-students" facilitate this process of humanization (Freire, 1970, p. 7)? Freire's solution to this (de)humanized conundrum is love. Through the loving, albeit difficult, relationship between oppressed and oppressor, humanity can be restored to both. The oppressed must be fearless and strong enough to address the oppressor with their truth in love. Simultaneously, the oppressor must recognize this difficult response as truthful. Freire (1970) posited,

[The oppressed] will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it. And this fight,

because of the purpose given it by the oppressed, will actually constitute an act of love opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressors' violence (p. 45).

A Freirian classroom exists in White spaces where students of color are present, not only physically, but also epistemologically, ontologically, and axiologically. For me the praxis of developing or encouraging the development of a Freirian classroom means creating space for the ways of knowing, being, and valuing connected to a raced identity to manifest, not benignly, but as an act of resistance to White supremacy. Furthermore, this identity must emerge in loving relation to White identity as an act of teaching and learning for emancipation, not oppression. It must exist in a way that offers access and equity for both White students and students of color to be more fully human.

Radical Commitments

In conjunction with love the humanizing classroom must also embrace radicalism, or a commitment to a radical response to injustice and oppression. The need for a radical ethic is connected to a fearless engagement with the injustice of the oppressor. Additionally, radicalism fundamentally undermines attempts at assimilation. As mentioned previously, in the second predominantly White setting, during the rare moments my students of color did contribute to class dialogue, their comments were often assimilative. In these moments, their voices were present but supportive of racist commentary. Clearly, the presence of their voices is not enough.

Alternatively, the pedagogical import of a raced politic lies in its ability to be obviously contradictory and oppositional:

Radicalization, nourished by a critical spirit, is always creative. Sectarianism mythicizes and thereby alienates; radicalization criticizes and thereby liberates. Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality. (Freire, 1970 p. 37)

What is significant about a radicalized student of color voice is its potential to “transform [the] concrete, objective reality” of White supremacy in the classroom. A radical, oppositional student of color voice prevents White supremacy from existing unchallenged. It gives White supremacy something to deal with. It acknowledges, identifies, and clarifies racial antagonism. Furthermore, it makes the evils of White supremacy real. White supremacy can no longer exist in the classroom as a benign reality. Instead, a radicalized student of color voice reflects White supremacy back to White students. This reflection reveals White supremacy as not simply a personal validated/valuable opinion, but as it is experienced by students of color, as a cultural violence.

Counter-Hegemonic Narrations

As mentioned previously, the mere physical presence of students of color does not begin the radicalized reflection process. What I have also noticed in the process of comparing my two teaching spaces through a Freirian lens is the importance of storied lives in the classroom. Radicalism and love apart from narrated life stories is impotent. Students' of color storied lives serve as counter-hegemonic text in the classroom (Lawrence, 1995). These stories make the violence of White supremacy real, and its master narratives a lie. They also make mutual humanity through lives in relation essential. When White students have to come face to face with the lived-experiences of students of color, they are left with one of two options. They can either choose not to recognize through socio-cognitive resistance; the apathetic refusal to learn through others' lives and experiences. Alternatively, they can acknowledge the cognitive dissonance that results from hearing the counter-hegemonic narratives of their colleagues of color and begin the work of integrating these new narratives into the collection of their personal life histories. One choice requires a social, ontological denial that limits authentic humanity by building one's personal reality on an untruth, while the other opens up space for the development of a more fully truthful understanding of oneself in relation to a more expansive community of people.

Freire (1970) argued that, "Education is suffering from narration sickness" (p. 71). This "sickness" is the result of teachers and students assuming that the educative process can stand apart from individuals and communities' storied lives. There is a need for White students to see themselves in relation to Others beyond the text. This can be achieved primarily through classroom dialogue with fellow students who embrace a raced politic. Within these moments of collective and resistant narration, students of color are able to be seen as same and Other simultaneously. The presence of a critical mass of students possessing a raced politic in the classroom provides the necessary critical or counter-hegemonic narration for pedagogical healing through consciousness-raising. Instead of more White-stream narration that supports privilege and oppression systems, students' of color voices make the abstract concrete by naming White supremacy and exposing its consequences on human lives in relation. Recognizing the struggle that the presence of multiple and conflicting narratives can cause, Freire argued that "Knowledge emerges only...through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire, 1970, p. 72). Alas, I will also concede that much of that "restless" "inquiry" "with each other" takes place among perceived equals in perceived safe spaces. While the nature of racism and

other forms of systemic oppression complicate perceptions of equality, the official markers of equality (shared titles and roles in the classroom) can assist in the process.

Limitations to Relationship

The teacher will never be capable of a relationship with students in the same way fellow students are in relation. The nature of Western, Euro-centric educational institutions load the role of “teacher” in ways that fundamentally impede completely equitable relationships (Mitchell & Edwards, 2010). As long as I am required to submit satisfactory grades to university administration at the conclusion of every semester in order for students to progress towards degree completion, I will not be seen as completely peer and colleague. My relationship with my students is necessarily tiered and stratified. As a teacher I may be committed to equitable, respectful classroom engagement. I may adhere to womanist tenets as a scholar and teacher. I may actively seek decolonization in my practice (Asher, 2010; hooks, 1994). Nevertheless, as I function within systemic “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” and as I am employed by one of the primary social institutions (higher education) that undergirds systems of injustice and inequity in this nation and globally, I cannot fool myself into believing the fairy tale of complete equality in the classroom.

This pedagogical conundrum makes it impossible for me, as teacher, alone to serve as storied Other with which my White students engage in “restless” “continuing” inquiry. This type of meaningful learning that challenges those taken-for-granted assumptions or habits of mind can only hope to arise from substantive engagement with peers that actively resist those assumptions and further narrate the flaws and fissures of White supremacy through the lens of their own lived experiences. Classroom colleagues who possess a raced politic and are willing to verbally express those socio-political, cultural values “assist [White] students to [un]cover through cultural meanings and lived experience those ideological frameworks...that encourage uncritical acceptance of exploitation. [Relational] [e]ducation helps students self-construct counter-hegemonic identities and then act as public citizens against individual and collective oppression” (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, 2012, para. 6). This type of relational education can only exist in safe, equitable, learning environments. Students must believe they are struggling with the ideas of people that will not, cannot do violence to them. The absence of potential violence is fundamental to uncovering or discovering more just and equitable ways of being in the world. Conversely, the presence of threat or potential violence, the lack of a safe space to dialogue and disagree, promotes retrenchment to master narratives and ideologies that support injustice and limit access.

I have seen this retrenchment all too often in my recent classrooms. When I am the only voice disagreeing with taken-for-granted assumptions undergirded by White supremacy, my White students often vehemently support their unthoughtful claims. When I continue to push them to think more critically, they fall silent in seeming protest. There is no exchange of ideas, no critical reflection, just the unwillingness to engage the authority in the classroom. When I attempt to push critical ideas through readings, assignments, or media, the students dismiss the text as insignificant or refuse to comment as not to disagree with me. While I frequently encourage respectful disagreement, my role as teacher and authority often trump my intentions.

I also realize much of this resistance and silent (silencing) protest is a response to how my body is “read as text” in the classroom (Baszile, 2008, p. 252). Not only am I teacher and authority, but I am concurrently read as oppositional and the antithesis to privileged White male supremacy. Before I open my mouth, my White students have determined my politics, my cultural affiliations, and the validity of my position. Like Baszile (2008),

I was being read as text, not simply as the teacher, but also as one of the few representations of blackness in the class and perhaps in their life-worlds. To this end, my effort at neutrality had a destructive, if not absurd, dimension as it allowed students to subsume me, to locate me—as they saw fit—within the master narrative. (p. 252)

In a White space absent of dissentingly collegial voices “students [have] little or no understanding of how they reproduce race as configurations of the self, of how they only assimilate...the ‘new’ information into unquestioned world views, and basically remain...steeped in...racism” (Baszile, 2008, p. 252). Substantive engagement with a critical mass of students of color who possess a raced politic can help White students move the critical text assigned in class from assimilated abstraction to concrete reality. In addition, it provides students of color the theoretical gateway to assert their position in academic spaces, spaces that have historically been hostile and contemporarily silencing to them (Dancy & Brown, 2011). It offers students of color the language to take ownership within the dialogical and pedagogical community, a community that exists within White supremacist parameters and has been a source of onto-epistemic not-belonging.

Concluding Questions, Thoughts, and Moving...On

What I hope I have made clear throughout this piece is that paramount to this entire practice we call pedagogy is the need for lives in relation, and the recognition of some of the factors that facilitate and impede the development of those relationships. Llewellyn & Llewellyn (2012) noted that it is, “critical to allow for students and teachers to see and understand the connectedness of people and thus the relations of power that define and mobilize knowledge”

(para. 2). While my professional shifts have been difficult, they have also ignited a deeper level of appreciation for the “connectedness of people” in the classroom and how that connectedness directly impacts the systems of power that (de)mobilize knowledge in (un)just ways. I have also begun to understand the profound potential students of color possess in bridging the lacunae of critical reflection for consciousness-raising. I now see my students of color as not only key to the development of mutual humanity in college classrooms, but also as the catalyst for meaningful communication between my White students and myself. Students of color in many ways are my philosophical translators. They make my pedagogical goals real and relevant.

With this in mind, I am now most concerned with how I can incite a raced politic in my students of color, particularly when the whiteness is thick. I realize safe, equitable, dialogical classrooms are not enough. If students do not use that space to voice dissenting, critical, and socially-just ideas, then learning for emancipation will not take place. Instead, these ideals for the classroom must work in tandem. While I am admittedly apprehensive about my life as a faculty member going forward, I also find myself reinvigorated. The violence of White supremacy in the classroom is still very real. However, the power of student of color voice is promising. And lately I have found it to be a ray of hope for a weary teacher.

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