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Critical Whiteness Studies and the Challenges of Learning to be a 'White Ally'

Nado Aveling

Murdoch University

In working with teacher education students (most of whom are white) to develop an explicitly ant-racist consciousness, it is one of my aims as a white teacher educator to examine how the boundaries of ethnicity, race and power make visible how whiteness functions as a social construction that is specific to its historical and social location. While I want white students to own their whiteness and to become aware of white race privilege, at the same time it is important to provide future teachers with strategies and resources that enable them to move beyond the feelings of guilt that critically examining whiteness frequently engenders. One way of addressing this is through the model of the 'white ally' (Tatum 1994), a concept that is inextricably tied to, not only the notion of "working with, rather for the Other" (Giroux 1993, 29), but also to the injunction to "work on racism for your sake, not their sake" (Yamato 1990, 423). In this paper a range of responses from a representative subgroup of the 2003 cohort of my students are presented with particular reference to the ways in which these students reflected on 'being white' and the ways in which they felt that being a white ally would help them in their own teaching. What I seek to do, in fact, is to clarify the effect that deconstructing whiteness has on students' perception of themselves as educators. At the same time I also take the opportunity to reflect on the challenges that working in this way poses for teacher educators.

1. I have been teaching a course titled "Aboriginal and Multicultural Education" for the past ten years. It is the only course within the four-year initial teacher education program at my university that specifically focuses on Indigenous and multicultural issues. It is a large course with annual enrolments of around 250 students. As a white teacher educator I have learned much about myself over the years and some things about the craft of teaching. If the majority of my students' responses are anything to go by, I am improving. Their comments, culled from a number of different cohorts, are likely to sound something like this:

Excellent course! I think it should be compulsory for all educators. Examining my own prejudices and beliefs during workshop discussions has been hard at times but I am conscious that there have been some real changes.

I came to realise that being Aboriginal in this country isn't as rosy as us whites see it to be.

Taught me lots I didn't know. It shocked me and made me think.

2. I also know that despite my best efforts I fail to reach a small proportion of students. I know that some of them only enrol in "Aboriginal and Multicultural Education" because it is a mandatory course. These students are apt to comment along the following lines:

I would never have done this course if I wasn't forced to and find it offensive that I need to pay for the privilege.

I felt I was forced to take on her views, otherwise I would not get anywhere with my marks.

Anti-racist content needs to be changed to ensure that white students are not affronted.

3. The feelings that these students expressed are not peculiar to my students. As Cochran-Smith has pointed out:

When we unleash unpopular things by making race and racism explicit parts of the curriculum,

responses are often strongly emotional, and resistance, misunderstanding, frustration, anger, and feelings of inefficacy may be the outcomes (1995, 542).

4. Despite the above comments, it would be too facile to divide students' responses into two opposing camps. It would also be naïve for me to assume that all my students enter my course presenting the same 'blank slates', or that some exit with a fully developed anti-racist consciousness and that others exit with their racism intact. What I want to do in this paper, therefore, is to present a range of responses from a representative subgroup of the 2003 cohort, with particular reference to the ways in which these students reflected on 'being white' at the end of the course and how they felt that this would help them in their own teaching. What I seek to do, in fact, is to clarify the effect that deconstructing whiteness has on students' perception of themselves as educators. At the same time I also take the opportunity to reflect on the challenges of remaining grounded within an anti-racist perspective while becoming increasingly pragmatic in my approaches.

Why teach about 'whiteness'?

5. 'Whiteness' is a construct that is not easily pinned down because it is not a trans-historical essence, but rather it refers to "a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced" (Frankenberg 1993, 6). This "set of locations" is, moreover, gendered and class-based. As Moreton-Robinson has argued in the Australian context:

White women's privilege in theory has become normalised because it is grounded in the assumption that the womanness of all women was the same version of womanness experienced by white middle-class women (1999, 33).

6. Further, whiteness is a relational category and whether acknowledged or not, it tends to be the norm against which other 'races' are judged. While whiteness is frequently invisible to those of us who are white, it is burdened with different layers of meaning: it is not just about skin colour but is "rather more about the *discursive practices* that because of colonialism and neocolonialism, privilege and sustain the global dominance of white imperial subjects and Eurocentric world views" (Shome 1999, 108-109).

7. In teacher education courses, critical whiteness studies reflect, as Levine-Rasky has pointed out, "the realisation that the failure of equity education initiatives is attributable to a misidentification of change object" (2000, 263). In other words, instead of studying down in the power structure and focussing upon racially oppressed groups, the gaze in critical whiteness studies is averted from "the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served" (Morrison 1991, 90).

8. Given that whiteness has been simultaneously ignored and universalised, and thus is both "opaque and transparent" (Delgado and Stancic 1997, 1), the critical study of whiteness is important in the field of education because:

Analysing whiteness opens a theoretical space for teachers and students to articulate how their own racial identities have been shaped within a broader racist culture and what responsibilities they might assume for living in a present in which Whites are accorded privileges and opportunities (though in complex and different ways) largely at the expense of other racial groups (Giroux 1997, 314).

9. In "Aboriginal and Multicultural Education", therefore, my students and I examine how the boundaries of ethnicity, race and power make visible how whiteness functions as a social construction that is specific to its historical and social location. To avoid the trap of "white fetishism", a phenomenon that "puts whites at the centre again" (Clark and O'Donnell 1999, 5) we also explore ways in which we can "affirm and interrogate the histories, memories and stories of the devalued others who have been marginalised from the official discourse of the canon" (Giroux 1993, 101).

10. For me as a teacher educator, the critical examination of whiteness is part of a larger project of anti-racism. In practice this means that without deconstructing "whiteness as 'race', as privilege, and as social construction" (Fine et al. 1997, vii) we cannot even begin to think in ways that are explicitly anti-racist. In other words, we cannot "hide behind our anti-racist credentials and avoid taking responsibility for the effects of [our] whiteness"

My teaching agenda and the context in which I teach

11. In many ways "Aboriginal and Multicultural Education" is about letting loose "the stinkbomb" of racism and to make my students (as well as myself) "uncomfortable in [our] Racism" and to encourage all of us to "take a stance against it" (Anzaldúa 1990, xix). This is not an easy task, especially as "racism is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Australian society and, as such, racist practices may be routinely enacted by people who do not consciously accept racist views" (Stephenson 1997, 1).

12. Each semester my students and I grapple with the issues that are embedded within "a pedagogy that speaks with rather than for the Other" (Giroux 1993, 29). Teaching against the grain is not simply a matter of teaching as one would any other 'subject' because exploring 'race' and racism with white students goes to the core of our socially constructed identities. I am well aware how confronting the risky business of examining our own social locatedness as privileged and white can be (see Aveling, 2001) and thus begin introductions to the course by sharing with my students stories about my own struggles to acknowledge my white subject position. When I talk to my students about some of the things that have shaped me, it is my intention to model ways in which students can critically analyse their own lives and interrogate their own assumptions about the meaning of whiteness. Thus, issues with which we attempt to come to grips during tutorials include the invisibility of whiteness and the ways in which we learn to racialise the Other but not our white selves, the 'common-sense' ways through which we understand racism and position ourselves as 'good whites' (who are not implicated in racism because we do not commit acts of racist violence).

13. Sometimes I catch myself slipping into the 'good white' subject position. This is embarrassing but at the same time it is also gratifying because when students catch me out, I know they are thinking critically. In fact, the whole process is far from easy, however, a willingness on my part to admit that the struggle is on-going and to admit (if shamefacedly) that I have far from 'arrived' in the anti-racism stakes leaves an opening for students to begin to explore their own histories and value positions (see also paper by Nicoll in this issue).

14. Over time I have developed a curriculum that comprises of three dimensions related to knowledge, attitudes and skills. These are not dissimilar from the components of multicultural education first described by Banks (1981) and built on by others (for example, Noel 1995; Villegas and Lucas 2002). Given that I am currently working on a twelve week semester schedule, I have divided the thirty-six teaching hours available to me in the following manner: one hour a week is devoted to delivering a lecture; one hour is scheduled for viewing audio-visual materials or introducing simulation games and other activities; a final hour is set aside for group discussions where the focus is derived from the readings set for each week. While mass lectures are perhaps not the most productive of pedagogies, given student numbers and funding issues, as well as most students' abysmal ignorance of Australia's racist past, a weekly lecture is the most efficient way to fill in some of the gaps in knowledge about this country's history; its past and present policies concerning Indigenous peoples and non-anglo minorities.

15. I choose readings that, I hope, speak to students' experiences and maximise 'story-telling' as a strategy to explicate different positionalities. My teaching strategies purposefully include experiential work and in-depth discussions that attempt to engage students in a personal way. This is important because:

Merely representing factual information about social inequity [and human diversity] does not necessarily enable pre-service teachers to examine the beliefs and assumptions that may influence the way they interpret these facts (King 1991, cited in Ladson-Billings 1999, 226).

16. To be as effective as I can be, I have learned that it is important not only to begin 'where students are at' and to be responsive to students' needs, but also to remain grounded in the theoretical perspective that informs my teaching. There is an obvious contradiction here because to be responsive to what some students want would equate to abandoning an anti-racist perspective. In other words, many students do not take readily to having just about everything they have ever thought of as 'right' and 'true' or 'normal'

overturned in one semester and many strenuously resist my attempts to deconstruct 'common-sense' cultural assumptions and frames of reference.

17. I used to agonise over the 'resisters' (see Aveling, 2002) and they are, of course, still of concern because they too are going to graduate in the fullness of time and be let loose to teach the nation's children. However, as the latest student surveys indicate, no matter what I do, for a very small percentage, 'race talk' is simply not what a teacher education course ought to be about. I must admit that after a decade I am frequently tempted to give up on these students despite the fact that they have taught me much. I have, for example, learned to no longer take their harsh criticisms personally. I have also learned that much as I might want to, I cannot simply dismiss these students as 'hard-core racists'. It has taken me some time to arrive at this realisation, and then only after reading Ghassan Hage who might have had these students in mind when he wrote:

Such people see racism as something ugly and bad. To somehow propose a different understanding of what racism is in order to convince them that they are 'ugly and bad' is not only bad academic practice, but, it seems to me, also ridiculously bad political practice (Hage 1998, 184).

18. It seems to me that it is also bad teaching. Hage further argues that if we are to achieve any understanding of social reality we need to take Spinoza's precept seriously: "not to deplore, not to laugh, not to detest, but to understand". In terms of those students who resist my approaches to deconstruct whiteness this would make sense. I am, however, still not entirely clear about how to go about this. As I have argued elsewhere (Aveling, 2002) I find it extremely difficult, for example, to put myself as well as the other students through racist diatribes based on some of the students' experiences with Indigenous people that they want to pass off as the ultimate 'truth' because it had happened to them.

Beyond 'white guilt'

19. Over the years I have become much more explicit with my students about

the fact that changing 'Whiteness' is not the issue, that guilt and shame are not the end of our curriculum but, rather, our joint thoughtfulness about how our society might dismantle its historical practices of social injustice (Gillespie et al. 2002, 249).

In fact, this is a point that I have to reiterate throughout the semester. I have found that it is not enough to say once: "This is not about making you feel guilty. This is about understanding how being white has shaped us as well as provided us with unearned privileges, and armed with this understanding, to do something about racism" (or words to that effect). Nevertheless, within this context I want students to acknowledge that Australia's history is not merely something that happened a long time ago, that it is, indeed, something that has on-going implications for Indigenous people and people of colour and by inference, for them as educators. While I want them (us) to own their (our) whiteness and to become aware of white race privilege, at the same time I believe that it is important to provide future teachers with strategies and resources that enable them to move beyond feelings of guilt, fear and alienation.

20. "But what can I do?" is a question that looms large for many of my students. This is not an idiosyncratic question, but one that seems to be echoed by teacher education students in other parts of the 'western' world. As Beverley Daniel Tatum suggested:

Helping students think this question through for themselves is part of our responsibility as educators who have accepted the challenge of teaching about racism. Heightened student awareness about racism without also providing some hope for social change is a prescription for despair. We all have a sphere of influence [...] For students, the task might be to identify what their own sphere of influence is (however large or small) and to consider how it might be used to interrupt the cycle of racism (1994, 465).

21. For me this approach has been liberating. While I acknowledge that all too frequently an unwillingness to become involved lurks behind our despair at being able to make a difference, I work from the assumption that my students want to 'make a difference' that is positive in students' lives. I would rather students enter the teaching profession confident that in some small way they can interrupt the cycle of individual racism than becoming mired in despair at the enormity and pervasiveness of institutional racism. That is not to

say that such an approach is entirely individualistic or that it gives us license to place institutional racism into the 'too hard basket'.

22. Given that individual and institutional racism are inextricably intertwined, when Tatum suggests that we consider our own sphere of influence and what we might do within that to interrupt the cycle of racism, she asks us to consider what we are prepared to do, both in addressing our own racism and tackling racism at the institutional level. The counter question which is more confronting, but perhaps much more pertinent, is posed by Moreton-Robinson (2000, xvii) who asks us to consider the limits to which we are prepared to go. These are not questions that can readily be answered in the abstract because our actions are likely to be situation and context specific. However, in working with my students I ask them to consider whether or not their replies are grounded in the concept that they must "work *with*, rather *for* the Other". As Tatum explains:

The role of the ally is to speak up against systems of oppression, and to challenge other whites to do the same. Teaching about racism needs to shift from an exploration of the experiences of victims and victimizers to that of empowered people of colour and their white allies, creating the possibility of working together as partners in the establishment of a more just society. (1994, 474).

23. In fact, at the heart of the endeavour is, as Moreton-Robinson has pointed out, the sharing, indeed, the "relinquishment of power" (2000, 186). While this may be a distant goal, Clark and O'Donnell have suggested that: "facilitating critical dialogue [...] may prove more valuable to realising this goal than we have previously believed, that is, talk may not be so cheap after all" (Clark and O'Donnell 1999, 3). Both my students and I need to believe that this is so because otherwise the practice of anti-racism largely becomes an exercise in futility. If racism is so pervasive, is in fact, a 'normal' part of Australian society, then what is the point of teaching in ways that are explicitly anti-racist? If indeed, individual efforts are no more than band-aiding a situation that could only be healed through the large-scale dismantling of institutional racism, then why bother?

24. Thus, rather than do nothing, many of my students take up Gloria Yamato's challenge 'not to give up':

Challenge oppression. Take a stand against it [...]. Do not expect that people of colour should teach you how to behave non-oppressively [...]. Work on racism for your sake, not "their" sake. Assume that you are needed and capable of being a good ally. Know that you'll make mistakes and commit yourself to correcting them and continuing on as an ally, no matter what. Don't give up (Yamato 1990, 423).

25. While being an ally is central to Yamato's argument, this concept must go hand in hand, not only with the notion of "working *with*, rather *for* the Other" but also with Yamato's injunction to "work on racism for your sake, not their sake". Holding these thoughts simultaneously can be somewhat of a juggling act and I have no doubt that students will indeed make mistakes, just as I know I have made them.

26. The danger, of course, is that such an approach might be seen as purely individualistic and spawn a whole generation of teachers who, in acknowledging their white race privilege, slip into a new mutation of the old concept of *noblesse oblige*. In fact, there are dangers everywhere. Certainly in taking the concept of the 'white ally' on board, there are a number of issues I have not yet thought through with sufficient care. As an ally what am I prepared to do? What am I not prepared to do? What are the consequences for me? What are the consequences for teachers? What are the implications for students and their communities? Where are the possibilities for forming alliances?

27. In sum, however, faced with the choice to give up in the face of hopelessness, or to try harder within a more individualistic framework of incremental change, I am, for the moment, prepared to live with the slippages and contradictions in my approaches and while I am never quite sure that I have gotten the balance right, I work on the principle that my role as a teacher educator is to "encourage critique and hope in equal measure" (Villegas and Lucas 2002, 58).

28. The slippages in my teaching and students' thinking will certainly become obvious in the next section of this paper where I present students' responses to selected readings: Gloria Yamato's *Something about the subject makes it hard to name* (1991) and Mary Gannon's *What would a white girl from Boston know about racism* (1999). I chose these

papers for discussion in the penultimate week of the semester because they both employ a first person narrative style and thus balanced nicely with the stories told in week one of the semester. In the intervening weeks we had discussed the social construction of race, had talked about gender and social class and had analysed, probed and punctured the notion of whiteness. We had also wrestled with the implications these constructs might have for students and teachers in classrooms. Thus, while the papers by Yamato and Gannon did not introduce unfamiliar material, they nevertheless recapitulated the 'same story' in a theoretically rigorous way, from 'black' and 'white' perspectives respectively. Interestingly, most students chose to discuss the paper by Yamato, which is certainly more confronting. Some told me their choice had been contingent on the relative length of each paper.

Students' voices: Re-assessing 'being white'

29. The data on which I draw here are derived from a group of sixteen students with whom I met on a weekly basis for discussion of the set readings. I also draw on the work of five additional students who, although they did not attend the discussion sessions, met with me on a semi-regular basis to raise issues of concern and to submit written work. All names used to identify individual quotations are pseudonyms. In the interest of protecting students' anonymity I have also changed other (minor) details.

30. Three of the twenty-one students chose to ignore my invitations to reflect on the papers on a personal level. These students focussed on providing summaries in the manner of: "This paper discusses racism and oppression and how difficult they are to eliminate" or "I found this paper very interesting and well written". They then proceeded to outline the nuances of the authors' arguments without ever directly engaging with the argument in terms of what the ideas might mean for them or indeed for their future teaching. Other students, however, responded in a more personal way. In fact, the response made by Kevin could not have been more personal or eye-opening. He wrote:

When I started this course I never expected it to be so confrontational and challenging of the beliefs and values I held. As each week progressed these articles have left me questioning my position as a white person. For me it has been challenging, confronting issues such as whiteness when I have an Aboriginal background, yet I am seen as a white person by society. Gannon's article has finally made me acknowledge my Aboriginality. This is not to say that I am ashamed of my background. I am not. But I would rather talk about this to people who respect Aboriginal culture (Kevin).

31. During the semester Kevin had been a competent but relatively quiet student. When he contributed to discussions I often felt that he was quite conservative because he seemed to subscribe to a deficit model of education for cultural minorities. Thus, his response suggested that it is not only 'white' students who benefit from deconstructing whiteness. While all students struggled with re-assessing their position as 'whites' and with 'not being defensive' only one student read Yamato's text as a personal affront:

This chapter has a very angry vibe to it. I believe that Yamato is, perhaps unaware/unintentionally racist against 'Whites'. The article is littered with comments such as "white folk are just plain lazy", "whites operating on misinformation" and (my personal favourite) "whites who want to be allies of those of colour". For someone attempting to combat racism she is, in my opinion, awfully racist. She classifies all 'whites' as the 'evil oppressor' who can't even be nice without being racist. [...] If you are told often enough, as in Yamato's article, that white people are an oppressive mob of power-driven, commercialised, homogenised, arrogant, yet educated people that need to be taught how to behave non-oppressively, you begin to believe it. [...] What does it mean to me to be white? It means being reminded daily about 'white supremacy' and being automatically labelled as racist. Despite what may have occurred in the past I am proud of my people, of what we have achieved and what we can achieve in a short period of time. I just want to be me, the clean slate with no skin colour or cultural stigmas, but to be white means to have 'white power' whether we want it or not (Jasmin).

32. I was surprised by Jasmin's comments because it seemed to me that her diatribe did not really reflect the bright and articulate person I thought I had come to know over the semester. I certainly do not know how to read her phrase "my personal favourite" when discussing the notion of being a white ally. At first I thought she was being sarcastic but I am no longer sure because her contributions during discussions seemed to indicate that she wanted to work for racial justice. I had intended to ask her about her comments but given the frenetic discussions (and leave-taking) of our last session together she

disappeared before I had a chance to do so. Perhaps I should not have been surprised because her responses are reminiscent of some of the opinions voiced in various "Letter to the Editor" sections of the print media that individualise racism and/or see whites as the 'new oppressed'. Given fewer time restrictions and a second semester at my disposal it is possible that Jasmin might have been able to work through her resistance within the context of our weekly discussion groups. Given another semester, Kevin might also have acquired the confidence to acknowledge his Indigeneity in class.

33. The remaining students read the text positively and did not seem to dwell overly on 'white guilt'. They particularly related to the message of hope they detected in the exhortation to be a 'white ally'. Elizabeth, David and Nick, for example, are not alone in finding this message inspiring:

I liked how Yamato gave clear examples of the different forms of racism, it made me think about what I might have been guilty of in the past. Also I liked her comment to white people "Assume that your effort to be a good friend is appreciated, but don't expect or accept gratitude from people of colour" (Elizabeth).

I found this article really inspiring. Yamato's message that white people should start to acknowledge racism and start to deal with it head-on, gave me hope that if we work together, to not give up, one day there will be an end to racism (David).

This paper has prompted me to think how I will deal with racism on different levels and how I will challenge oppression. This paper has prompted me to question how I as a white non-Indigenous person can become an ally to people from different cultures (Nick).

34. Andrew was another student who, despite some confusion about "saying the wrong thing" was buoyed by the paper because it reconfirmed for him that he could 'make a difference'. He wrote:

I have found that this course is sometimes confusing and I am sometimes worried about saying the wrong thing and insulting someone without intending to but I am glad to have finished with such a powerful reading. This has made me really think about what it is to be white and today I saw colour: my own. My white face in the mirror of my bathroom, in the house that I had no difficulty renting and in the car that my father bought me because I graduated high school. As I walk into university no one looks twice at me, it is easy to belong. My whiteness is all of these things and even more. The privilege of white people is simply immeasurable, it is about life chances. Yamato says "Know that you'll make mistakes and commit yourself to correcting them and continuing on as an ally, no matter what. Don't give up". I look forward to teaching in ways that are socially critical and making a real difference, at least in some students' lives. A rather fanciful notion, but I'm a bit like that (Andrew).

35. There is no doubt that the course had been a struggle for Andrew, not because he was not a highly capable student, but because he really engaged with the material at a deeply personal, as well as theoretical level. Other students too, were able to reflect on the different perspective they had developed during the course of the semester. This was not always easy as the following comments show:

A point which I didn't really catch on to when asked earlier in the semester in a study question something along the lines of how my race has affected how I was shaped. Was that because I am white and live in a white-centred culture I've never had to think about my identity as a white person. This is so true. I fit in everywhere, I'm accepted by everyone, so why would I ever have to think about my identity? But on the other hand, those excluded as 'other' would have to think about their identity almost everyday of their lives if they live in a white-centred culture like Australia. [...] The first time I answered these questions I didn't have much knowledge, or much of a sense of my whiteness, but now I seem to have a whole new perspective. [...] In analysing my earlier responses I would have to say the answers were made out of ignorance. I really had no sense of what my life meant in the context of racial differences and ultimately I have never been in a situation that has forced me to question my whiteness. I hope to be able to use the things I learned in my teaching (Sam).

As much as I agree with Yamato that racism can't be wished away there are a number of things when I first read the article I felt that her opinions are very generalised because they are focused on black versus white. Is this not being racist herself? I felt that this is failing to identify the individuality that occurs between groups. I felt that she is being very limited to the racism she is challenging by focussing purely on colour. When I read it again I changed my mind. This is definitely the most powerful and thought-provoking article that I have read in this course. Even though I don't want to admit it, I think because I am white and have had my own thoughts challenged I reacted defensively (Thomas).

For me, the reading prompted a review of other materials covered during the semester which caused me to confront my racial and social positioning. [The reading in week 9] was the real catalyst for self-examination, forcing me to use my 'white self' instead of the 'other' as the starting point and helping me to face the awful truth of both my own racism and ethnocentric attitudes and the privileged position in society I have taken for granted. This questioning of my position is now filtering into my daily thinking and becoming an inseparable part of my character (Kate).

36. These self-reflective pieces show how students felt they had grown. Within the context of teacher education, however, what is of greater significance are the implications of these insights for students' future professional praxis. In other words, to what extent does deconstructing whiteness help them to become better teachers?

37. As I indicated earlier, I am frequently caught in a dilemma when working with students: on the one hand I want my students to enter the teaching profession knowing that they can make a difference and that they can play their part in working against racism. On the other hand, however, this means I tend to gloss over (quite unwittingly sometimes) and almost negate the pernicious effects of institutional racism. This has come back to bite me, as the following responses show:

I have learned that there is a great importance in acknowledging racism. It is easy for people to say "I'm not a racist, I don't call people names or treat them unjustly". People need to realise there is more than verbal or physical abuse associated with racism and by ignoring that there is a problem emphasises the need to tackle racism. Yamato also suggests that the problem of racism will not go away until there is a more even distribution of power (this relates to the class structure) within society. Teachers can assist this process by creating a fair and inclusive classroom in which students learn about racism. This was never addressed while I was at school and I believe that by educating the youth of Australia we can come close to eradicating the problem (Veronica).

There is no doubt in my mind that we are a long way from eradicating racism in our society and it certainly can't just be wished away. As a future teacher I can at least help combat racism by changing or eradicating any racist attitudes that may be present in my class. I think that if we can tackle racism at a grass-roots level in the schools then eventually this will spread through the wider community and may indeed lead to the end of racism. It may take a few hundred years, but if we can live in a society that is free of all types of racism then it will surely be worth the wait (Angie).

38. In the first quote, Veronica discusses the varieties of racism (including institutional racism), and in the next breath suggests that racism in its diverse manifestations can be overcome through education. Angie, similarly resorts to the classic liberal interpretation and suggests that even if it takes a century, tackling education at the grass-roots level can end racism. These two responses are not atypical. I would even go so far as to suggest that they are fairly representative of the majority of students. And herein lies the dilemma because I do not want to disabuse entirely the notion that education can be a powerful change agent and that racism is something we can overcome. To do that would make the course I teach almost meaningless. I have spent some time pondering this quandary and have, I am afraid, no answers. All I have is a sense of optimism that critically deconstructing whiteness and working with students to explore different ways of seeing social reality, will allow them to see that there are different perspectives and that they will take that knowledge with them as they mature as educators. Ultimately, however, I will never know.

Further reflections

39. When reading through my students' responses the inescapable conclusions for me were that individual students will always respond to the course and read the material according to the ways in which their "history and their present come together" (Kenway 1992, 69), no matter how much I might want to shape the process. As a teacher educator this should not come as a surprise. By way of conclusion then, I want to frame 'the problem' differently and rather than thinking in terms of binary opposites (that is, thinking in terms of achieving the desired outcomes or not achieving the desired outcomes) I propose that it is more useful to think in terms of a continuum that moves from dys-consciousness at one end of a continuum and consciousness at the other.

40. Villegas and Lucas (2002) have articulated this particularly well. They suggested that culturally responsive teachers are those who have (among other attributes) socio-cultural consciousness as well as a sense that they are both responsible for and capable of

bringing about educational change that will make schooling more responsive to students from diverse backgrounds. The authors place dys-consciousness at one end and consciousness at the other end of a continuum that might be labelled socio-cultural consciousness. Developing a socio-cultural consciousness is central to the work I do with my students and, it seems to me, an important foundation of anti-racism.

41. Villegas and Lucas suggested that dys-conscious individuals:

See their own world view as universal [...] are insensitive to the fact that power is differentially distributed in society [...] they have an unshakable faith that society operates according to meritocratic principles and that existing inequalities in social outcomes are justified (Villegas and Lucas 2002, 32).

Certainly this has a ring of 'truth' to it when it comes to the beliefs that a great many of my students hold at the beginning of the semester. However, as end-of-semester evaluations attest, it is only a small proportion of students who hold fast to those views.

42. By contrast, Villegas and Lucas argue that:

those at the consciousness end of the continuum are fully aware that a multiplicity of perspectives on the world exist [...] they understand that power is differentially distributed in society and that social institutions, including the educational system, are generally organised to advantage the more powerful groups; and they are critical of existing inequalities (Villegas and Lucas, 2002, 32).

43. It is useful to keep in mind that, no matter how aware we might be, we fall somewhere along the continuum, rather than inhabit either/or spaces. When reflecting back over the semester, this certainly makes a great deal of sense. While I am not prepared to locate my students at different points along the continuum or to attempt to measure the distance they have travelled, I can see that distances have indeed been travelled. In my more optimistic moments I think perhaps even the 'resisters' have moved somewhat along the continuum. Given the nature of the task and the extent of the institutional constraints under which we work, that is perhaps the best we can expect.

Nado Aveling lectures in Education at Murdoch University with responsibilities for teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in social justice studies. Her most recent research has focused on the use of auto/biographical narratives to deconstruct the normativity of 'whiteness' and the social construction of gendered and racialised subjectivities. Email: n.aveling@murdoch.edu.au

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