

DISRUPTING THE NORMATIVITY OF WHITENESS WITH TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENTS: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

NADO AVELING*

Introduction: The position from which I speak

In this paper I want to reflect on the ways in which I work with teacher education students to assist them to read the cultural codes through which they/we have constructed their/our own narratives and histories and to identify problematic areas when doing this work. I want to focus in particular on 'story-telling', a teaching strategy that seeks to make visible how whiteness functions as a historical and social construction. I conclude with the contention that becoming aware of our own racial positioning is not quite enough if whiteness studies are to progress the work of 'understanding and dismantling racism'.¹

Within teacher education — and specifically within the context of a course titled *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education* which I have been teaching for some years — it is important to 'turn the gaze around' and instead of focusing on the differences/ shortcomings perceived in the Other, it is vital to decentre and deconstruct the normativity of whiteness. 'Whiteness' itself is a term that is not easily pinned down. However, in the work which I do with students I make it clear at the outset that whiteness is frequently 'invisible' as a social construct, that it is burdened with different layers of meaning and that it is not monolithic. Thus 'whiteness':

- is a completely constructed product of local, regional, national, and global relations, past and present ... it is also a relational category, one that is co-constructed with a range of other racial and cultural categories, with class and with gender.²
- involves skin colour; involves whiteness as a state of being — as lived experience constituting, among other things, unearned privileges; and involves an ideology - beliefs, policies and practices (often unarticulated) that enable whites to maintain power.³

* Nado Aveling lectures in Education at Murdoch University with responsibilities for teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in social justice studies. Her more 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.

¹Jane Drurie, *Writing Whiteness in the West: no single white body*, paper presented at Crossroads: Third International Cultural Studies conference, Birmingham, England, 2000, p. 7.

²Ruth Frankenberg, *The social construction of whiteness: white women, race matters*, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. 17-18.

³S. Nombuso Dlamini, 'From the Other Side of the Desk: notes on teaching about race when racialised', *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 5.1, 2002, p. 58.

- has been simultaneously ignored and universalised. Whiteness and Westernness have not, for the most part, been conceived as 'the problem' in the eyes of white Western people, whether in research or elsewhere.⁴

Certainly 'whiteness' was not something I used to think much about, either in my personal or my professional life. Increasingly, however, I have become more aware of the ways in which whiteness as an ideology has impacted on my life and come to understand that my whiteness as well as my gender has been central to the discourses that shaped me. Thus my own experiences of growing up meant that I was very aware of being a 'migrant kid' and a girl of whom certain things were expected according to my gender. I was also aware of social class differences: some of us had the required books and new school uniforms and some of us made do without; some of my class friends went on to attend private schools and the rest of us were enrolled in the local high school which had the reputation of being 'the second worst school in the state'. However, being 'white' was something we all took for granted. There were no Aboriginal students at our school (at least we didn't know of any) and those of us who were 'new' Australians had come to this country at a time when the *Immigration Restriction Act, 1901* — the 'White Australia' policy — was still firmly in place.

In *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education* 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. 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'⁵. I believe that it is as important to interrogate what it means to be white, as it is to listen to the stories of the Other: it is crucial to problematise privilege as well as oppression. My overarching aim in teaching this course then, is to facilitate learning experiences that disrupt preconceptions and to 'learn to speak with rather than for the Other'.⁶

Finally, in teaching *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education* in ways that acknowledge borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power, I situate my praxis within a pedagogy that:

is a process that is intent on challenging existing boundaries of knowledge and creating new ones, border pedagogy offers the opportunity for students to engage the multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences and languages. This means educating students to both read these codes historically and critically while simultaneously learning the limits of such codes, including the ones they use to construct their own narratives and histories ... students should engage knowledge as border-crossers, as people

⁴ Frankenberg, *The social construction of whiteness*, p. 236.

⁵ Henry Giroux, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*, Routledge, New York and London, 1993, p. 101.

⁶ *ibid*, p. 29.

moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power.⁷

Problematic aspects of border work

Given the 'racial'/ethnic mix of students who attend my classes, one of the dangers that exists in my attempts to 'turn the gaze around', is that I do not fall into the trap of thinking of my classrooms as consisting of only white students. I have sometimes been caught out. In a lecture, for example, I referred to all of us as immigrants, when I should have been more precise and said that those of us who are not Indigenous to this land are all immigrants, no matter whether we arrived with the first fleet or not. Given the distribution of Indigenous people in the population as a whole together with the relatively low participation rates of Indigenous peoples in higher education, it is perhaps not surprising that Indigenous students comprise only a small percentage of students in *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education*. It has been my experience that these students generally remain silent in the early weeks of semester. Thus, ways in which I might be able to include these students more fully remain elusive. Nevertheless, those Aboriginal students and students of colour who enrol in *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education* have consistently continued to attend classes without 'dropping out'. I would like to think that I encourage them to contribute if and when they feel comfortable to do so, however, I am mindful not to put them 'on the spot' because I do not want them to feel that they have to embody 'the Aboriginal voice'. Not so long ago, for example, one student — the only Indigenous person in the group — commented that after having spent two weeks in a local school, that she was sick and tired of always having to be the 'authority' on Aboriginality.

Nevertheless, as most of my students are 'white', an integral part of my teaching/learning agenda consists of reading the codes of our cultural constructs and deconstructing the normativity of whiteness. In practice this is not unproblematic. Over the years, for example, feedbacks from cohort after cohort reflects a remarkably similar pattern of polarised responses. In a nutshell, I have a sense that white students either love the course and perceive it as life-changing, or find it altogether too confronting and reject the content out of hand, or indeed personalise their discomfort and attack me as 'too politically correct', or worse. Certainly one student when asked (anonymously) about the best aspects of the course answered 'nil' and when asked to suggest changes wrote 'everything'. Over the years I have agonised about ways in which to reach all students, but have come to the conclusion, as others have before me, that providing the conditions for 'crossing over into cultural borders that offer different narratives' does not automatically lead to 'cultural re-mapping'.⁹ In

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ The feedback on which I draw in this paper is derived from students enrolled in both internal and external modes of study (1996 - 2002) and is based on anonymous evaluations conducted by the University's Teaching and Learning Centre, as well as anecdotal information such as comments made during tutorials as well as student journals and other assessed writing (excerpts reproduced with permission).

⁹ Dlamini, *op cit.*, p. 63.

fact, it is my contention that some students will continue to resist, no matter what I do.

Some 'white' students come into the course with certain preconceptions: they believe that in substance it is a course that is about an Other who is somehow peripheral to the 'real' business of schools and education. A number of students suggested that racism is something that only happens in schools that have Aboriginal students or students from non-English speaking backgrounds who have learning or indeed social problems; they talked about the problems of teaching students whose culturally specific learning styles must be acknowledged but who must, at the same time, be assisted to become proficient in dominant cultural codes if they are to succeed in the 'mainstream'. Other students, when they enrol in courses like mine, expect to deal with issues concerning Aboriginal or migrant kids and to learn how to 'help those less fortunate' than themselves. What many of them want are certainties: strategies for effective classroom practice and cultural 'information' sheets that outline different cultural mores and practices. At the beginning of each semester when asked about their expectations for the course students are apt to write comments like the following:

- My expectations include some ideas about what works with Aboriginal students;
- Practical information and skills for teaching situations; and
- To learn more about different cultures and to learn skills that I can use in my teaching career.

While these are valid concerns, and I certainly attempted to address these students' expectations to varying extents, it is not my intention to provide specific 'how-to' information, even if that were possible. My intentions are to disrupt preconceptions and to equip students with the conceptual tools, and personal as well as theoretical insights, to teach in ways that are sensitive to cultural specificities and alert to power differentials that privilege some students and marginalise others. If students are to become successful practitioners who are more than good technicians who know their subject matter and keep order in the classroom, they need not only to learn to listen to the stories of the Other, they also need to be able to interrogate their own assumptions and racialised subject positions; to understand the codes 'they [we] use to construct their [our] own narratives and histories'.

Sometime this happens: many students actually take on board the idea that their whiteness provides them with unearned privileges and explore ways in which they can become actively anti-racist. Others appear unable to successfully negotiate the pitfalls associated with critically analysing their racialised positionality. In my experience there are two broad problems here: the first relates to the ease with which white students conflate 'whiteness' with white racism and remain fixed in positions of guilt or resentment. As I want to put the construction of whiteness 'on the table to be investigated, analysed, punctured and probed'¹⁰ care needs to be taken not to deconstruct whiteness

¹⁰ Henry Giroux, 'White Squall: resistance and the pedagogy of whiteness', *Cultural Studies*, 11.3, 1997, p. 430.

only in terms of racism and oppression because this makes it difficult for white people to view themselves as both white and anti-racist at the same time. If deconstructing 'whiteness' is to live up to its challenge then, as Giroux has pointed out, we need to 'provide a nuanced, dialectical and layered account that would allow white youth and others to appropriate selected elements of white identity and culture as oppositional'.¹¹ This is an on-going process and one that I am not sure that I have even begun to address adequately.

The second problematic, with critically analysing racialised positionalities, relates to student resistance. Recently one student commented rather vituperatively in his journal:

These readings were not included to enhance knowledge or interest, there were put there to encourage guilt in non-aboriginal (sic) Australians. The study questions are geared the same way [...] I don't need people asking stupid questions that are trying to be clever and failing miserably [...]. I am sick of people throwing it in my face. I didn't do anything!!! Some heathen bastards from the 1700s who didn't know any better are responsible. Let's move on, stop wasting energy looking for apologies and throwing history in the faces of non-aboriginal (sic) Australians.

This student's comments hint at unresolved dilemmas I have in teaching at the borders. Thus in the remainder of this paper there are two further problematic aspects of border work which I want to address: the first concerns the use of autobiographical narrative as a teaching strategy; the second concerns 'white' students coming to voice and the extent to which they can be given the freedom to explore their value positions without such conversations degenerating into racist diatribe.

Autobiographical narrative as teaching strategy

One of the major preoccupations of border pedagogy is the concept of voice and the question of who can speak for whom. This opens up possibilities for those of us who see teaching as a form of social criticism and take seriously the call to rethink the nature of university teachers' role 'with respect to issues of politics, social responsibility, and the construction of a pedagogy of possibility'.¹² Voice — through the stories that students and teachers tell each other — becomes a key element in a critical pedagogy because it disrupts taken-for-granted assumptions and alerts teachers and students to the fact that all discourse is 'situated historically and mediated culturally'.¹³

For writers such as McLaren and Giroux critical pedagogy 'links the critical study of power, language, culture and history to the practice of a critical

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 383.

¹² Giroux, *Border Crossings*, p. 105.

¹³ Peter McLaren, *Revolutionary Multiculturalism: pedagogies of dissent for the new millennium*, Westview Press, Colorado, 1997, p. 229.

Nado Aveling

pedagogy, one that values student experience and student voice'.¹⁴ There is value in 'deconstructing a discursive self' in any educational endeavour because 'analytically depicting the structures of the self, enables the individual to reconfigure these structures ... [and] ... to see new configurations of reality'¹⁵ is crucial for those of us engaged in teacher education. Thus I make clear at the outset the 'position from which I speak' through the practice of story-telling. I invariably begin introductions to the course and to each other by sharing some of my history and recollections with my students.

In explicating my speaking position I lay no claim to an essential self because that would:

deny the way in which historical conditions, material forces, and cultural discourses shape articulations of the self. A theory of the subject in autobiography must posit the existence of multiple and contradictory subjectivities as the effect of multiple discourses at a particular historical moment. [...] The humanist essentialist view of the self tends to mask the way in which we are constituted in language and positioned differently there — depending on race, class, gender or ethnicity.¹⁶

If human subjectivities are fragmented, then it follows that our narratives do not represent some essential truth of experience nor do they represent an authentic self that can be laid bare of all its artifice. Rather, drawing on memories — which are always partial and contested — I attempt to contextualise and read the cultural codes that have shaped me while simultaneously acknowledging the 'limits of such codes, including the ones [I] use to construct [my] own narratives and histories'.¹⁷ I talk about many things to my students — such as sitting in a classroom unable to understand what was being said; the ways in which I was taught an Australian history that was devoid of references to Indigenous peoples, as well as labour conditions at the steelworks where my father laboured to buy our share in the 'Australian dream' — each time attempting to link 'the autobiographical 'I' to the historical, cultural and communal narratives'¹⁸ that inform our histories and the curriculum.

While the drive within critical story-telling is towards transformation of praxis, at the same time there is also a danger that story-telling degenerate into a white 'me-too-ism' *vis-a-vis* the plethora of so-called 'ethnic stories' that

¹⁴ Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, P. 'Teacher Education and the Politics of Engagement: The case for democratic schooling', *Harvard Educational Review*, 56.3, 1989, p. 213.

¹⁵ Pinar, W. F., Reynolds, W. M., Slattery, P. and Taubman, P. M., *Understanding Curriculum: An Introduction to the Study of Historical and Contemporary Curriculum Discourses*, Peter Lang, New York, 1995, p. 537.

¹⁶ Bergland, B. Postmodernism and the Autobiographical Subject: Reconstructing the 'Other', in: Ashley, Gilmore & Peters (Eds) *Autobiography and Postmodernism*, The University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1994, p. 161.

¹⁷ Giroux, *Border Crossings*, 29.

¹⁸ Bergland, *op cit.*, p. 139.

Disrupting the Normativity of Whiteness with Teacher Education Students

have emerged world-wide over the last decade or so,¹⁹ or more specifically within the Australian context, the numbers of Aboriginal autobiographical narratives that tell Aboriginal stories from the perspectives of the people who lived those stories rather than the perspectives of the colonisers.

Generally students enjoyed the autobiographical narratives of Indigenous writers like Sally Morgan, Glenys Ward, Ruby Langford and Alice Nannup²⁰ but found it more difficult to tell their own stories, often making comments in the beginning such as 'but it's so boring', or 'we're just normal people really — not much of a story'. Nevertheless, as the semester progresses many students begin to see the importance of critically examining their own experiences and at the end of the course have commented along the following lines:

- Excellent course — I think it should be compulsory for all educators — I learned a great deal and enjoyed having space to explore my feelings and attitudes;
- I enjoyed story-telling — as a newcomer to Australia I enjoyed the multicultural stuff — as a 'minority' person, I always did readings from minority people's point of view — 'minority' issues were MY issues; and
- I appreciated the way it valued students' experiential past.

However, if my (and others') story telling is not just a case of white 'me-too-ism', then what is the point of deconstructing whiteness? Indeed at a time when Aboriginal writers have/ are in the process of developing a discourse that decentres whiteness it is pertinent to ask: 'whose interests are served by examining whiteness?'²¹ Given the dangers, where then does antiracism intersect with whiteness studies? To reiterate my earlier point, I believe that within the context of Indigenous and multicultural education, notions of privilege as well as issues of oppression must be explored; if teacher education students take the idea of antiracist education seriously they need to become familiar with the stories of the silenced and also explore the 'profound social consequences that [the] construction [of whiteness] holds for the non-white'²² Further, as Ruth Frankenberg has pointed out:

To leave whiteness unexamined is to perpetuate a kind of asymmetry that has marred even many critical analyses of racial formation and cultural practice [...] critical attention to whiteness offers a ground not only for the examination of white selves (who may indeed be white

¹⁹ See for example, Anzaldua, G. (Ed), *Making Face, Making Soul, Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Colour*, Aunt Lute Foundation Book, San Francisco, 1990.

²⁰ Sally Morgan, *My Place*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987; Alice Nannup, with Marsh & Kinnane, *When the Pelican Laughed*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1992; and Ruby Langford, *Don't Take your Love to Town*, Penguin, 1988.

²¹ Angie Chabram-Dermersian, A. On the Social Construction of Whiteness within Selected Chicana/o Discourses, in: Frankenberg (Ed) *Displacing Whiteness: essays in social and cultural criticism*, Duke University Press, Durham & London, 1997.

²² Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg, Series Editors' Preface, *Revolutionary Multiculturalism*, 1997.

others, depending on the position of the speaker) but also for the excavation of the foundations of all racial and cultural positions. [...] critical analyses of whiteness are vital concomitants of engagements with racial subordination²³

When I talk to my students about some of the things that have shaped me, it is my intention to model ways in which 'the realisation of self as a narrative in process serves to gather together what one has been, in order to imagine what one will be, and to judge whether this is what one wants to become'.²⁴

My own story illustrates the ways in which autobiographical narrative can be used as a springboard to explore a myriad of issues related to identity and belonging, as well as curricular matters and teaching in ways that are explicitly antiracist. However, story-telling as a teaching strategy is fraught with personal risks: as an academic I found it hard in the beginning because telling my story left me feeling vulnerable and less in control. I can only imagine how difficult it must be for students — especially those few Aboriginal students and students of colour who enrol in *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education* — to take such risks. While most students respond positively to the invitation to reflect on their own stories — because it signalled a rightful space within which their experiences count as legitimate knowledge — for others to engage with the personal was too hazardous. The issues with which we grapple during tutorials tend to stretch comfort zones beyond the limits that some students find tolerable. However, I believe that a willingness on my part to become engaged in a personal way and to make connections between my own experiences and readings that deal with key concepts permits students to begin to explore their own histories and value positions.

A number of students have told me that they feel that the knowledge gained from their readings has prepared them much better to challenge racist remarks when they occur and that being able to articulate their position in class has enabled them to speak out against racism. However, students also talk about how difficult this is, especially when racist slurs occur within a social or a professional context. Other students also recounted times when they had spoken out and how this was becoming easier. One student commented that she had found the course 'extremely difficult' and her journal entries are evocative of the feelings many students expressed. She wrote:

I must confess that because of the way I've been brought up [...] I grew up 'knowing' that Tasmanian Aboriginals, in fact all Aboriginals, were not as bright — they were not on the same human developmental level as us. Is it any wonder that I now find that this is wrong and I start to question all other assumptions and I have become to some extent hostile and protective of my own culture. I'm not trying to excuse

²³ Ruth Frankenberg, 'Introduction: Local Whiteness, Localizing Whiteness', in Frankenberg (Ed) *Displacing Whiteness: essays in social and cultural criticism*, Duke University Press, Durham & London, 1997, pp. 1-2.

²⁴ Donald Polkinghorne, 1988, cited in Diane Gillespie, Leslie Ashbaugh and Joann DeFiore, 'White Women Teaching White Women about White Privilege Race Cognizance and Social Action: toward a pedagogical pragmatic', *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 5.3, 2002, p. 238.

Disrupting the Normativity of Whiteness with Teacher Education Students

myself but I have at times felt alienated, guilty, angry [...] I haven't committed these terrible racist acts [...] but then I perpetuate the situation by becoming defensive and keeping silent rather than looking at what I can do [...] I am guilty of being racist simply by allowing people to speak or act the way they do.

This student's comments are in stark contrast to the student whom I quoted earlier and who objected to the readings because he felt that they were designed merely to 'encourage guilt in non-Aboriginal Australians'. For the student who acknowledged that she was apt to become defensive, exploring her own value positions has been a painful experience, but one that has led to growth and change. As Giroux has pointed out 'trauma in this case can become a useful pedagogical tool in helping them locate themselves within and against the discourse and practice of racism'.²⁵ This student, and students like her, was able to overcome her resistance to analysing critically the 'normative-residual practice of white cultural practice'²⁶ despite the trauma this caused.

It is ironic that in my attempts to facilitate dialogue, I have a sense that those of us who are 'white' sometimes need our own space to fully explore our value positions. In 'mixed' groups I worry about exposing Aboriginal students and students of colour to some of the ideas that are expressed. It is all very well to subscribe to the notion that border pedagogy 'does not silence in the name of its own ideological fervour or correctness',²⁷ however, the essential dilemma for me was in determining the point at which I needed to step in so that my silence did not give tacit consent to students articulating gross racist stereotypes with impunity.

Silencing students?

Each year I detect gradual changes in a willingness to become engaged and differences in tenor in group discussions. Thus some students have commented anonymously at the end of the semester:

- It has been challenging and rewarding — examining my own prejudices and beliefs 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.
- She encourages all students to participate and challenge their points of view in a non-threatening environment — it [the course] made me re-think my position in this country and had a profound effect on my thoughts about racism.

Others, however, saw the same teaching/learning context in totally different ways and despite my intentions of creating an atmosphere of trust and openness these students complained bitterly:

²⁵ Henry Giroux, 'Re-writing the discourse of racial identity: towards a pedagogy and politics of whiteness', *Harvard Educational Review*, Cambridge, Summer, 1997, p. 3.

²⁶ Giroux, *Discourse of racial identity*, p. 10.

²⁷ Giroux, *Border Crossings*, p. 101.

- I could not participate in the workshops because my opinion did not fit in with what was being taught — students should be allowed to express their feelings and beliefs more, rather than being penalised for this;
- I felt I was forced to take on her views — otherwise I would not get anywhere with my marks; and
- A lot of people were very angry and didn't say what they really thought — this course should encourage people to work through their ideas but it doesn't.

I could say that these students simply read the text of our discussions in different ways or I could infer that people will always be racist, no matter what. However, I believe that these different readings can, in part be attributed to the ways in which I dealt with the dilemma in which I found myself: that is, to strike a balance between the ways in which I used my position of authority to silence some students and allowing others to explore their subject positions. In theory I endorse the notion that students be offered the opportunity to 'air their positions on whiteness and race regardless of how messy or politically incorrect such positions might be'. In practice, however, achieving the space in which all students are able to challenge and re-articulate their positions 'through an ongoing analysis of the material realities and social relations of racism'²⁸ proved to be easier said than done.

In fact there were times when I found it extremely difficult to continue to give some students the freedom to express their views and explore their value positions when those views were racist in the extreme. For example, one student often couched tutorial contributions in terms that were offensive to 'minority' peoples. While other students attempted to point this out, the student in question persisted to use derogatory terms with a smile and a shrug and comments like 'I know, I know, I'm not being politically correct, but I don't mean anything by it'. This student did not seem to want to engage in critical discussions, he seemed to want to stir up the class and sit back and watch the fun. In some ways I think he fulfilled a valuable function in generating heated discussions, however, I also detected (or thought I did) unease on the part of other students who were uncomfortable and did not seem to know how to silence his excesses. In this particular case, it seemed to me that I needed to use my position of authority (and final arbiter of course grades — which I suspect, some students understood better than my desire to foster open dialogue) to silence some students in order to protect the freedom of others.

Each year as I teach this course I seem to be able to do it a little better than the year before as my understanding of my own positioning as well as my understanding of where students are coming from grows. Thus I am able to deal much better with students who appeared to be looking for quick fixes and strategies without having to engage with complex issues. I am also becoming increasingly confident in judging the moment when 'enough is enough'. Certainly, over the years I have become much more explicit with my students about

²⁸ Giroux, *Discourse of racial identity*, p. 10.

Disrupting the Normativity of Whiteness with Teacher Education Students

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.²⁹

Final reflections

It has been my experience in working with students that critical story-telling can contribute to an antiracist pedagogy by making the space in which I/we can grapple with issues that are embedded within a pedagogy that speaks with rather than for the Other. While most students valued the experience of story-telling, it does not automatically follow that the process of deconstructing the discursive self will in all cases lead to transformation because individuals will always read the text of story-telling differently according to the ways in which their 'history and their present come together'.³⁰ In many ways the process — from inviting students to become more self-reflective through the stories we tell each other to being able to critically examine those stories — is quite ephemeral. I have not yet found a 'fool-proof' way to ensure that 'insights happen' for all students. Nevertheless, critically reflecting on our own positions about race and what it might mean to be white; enables some insights into the ways in which the social construction of 'race' has real material consequences for those who are positioned as 'non-white'. There are times when I have felt that I was too intolerant of some students' early attempts to rethink their position *vis-a-vis* 'race' and too quick to use my authority to silence students who seem to want to go on and on (and on) about their experiences with, and therefore their understanding of, Indigenous peoples. At other times I believe that my silences would only serve to condone what amounted to little more than white posturing, drawing attention to itself as the latest victim of 'political correctness'. In other words, for many students the practice of critical story telling disrupts pre-conceptions about 'race'. For a handful of others, I suspect, pre-conceptions remain firmly in place. While these students are of concern, I am becoming increasingly convinced that a semester is unlikely to change deeply entrenched attitudes and that my priorities must be those students who have taken the implication of seeing 'race' on board but who seem stuck in the 'guilty white' model.

While Scheurich has suggested that we need to 'to make white racism a central, self-reflective topic of inquiry [...]. We need to become aware of our racial position,³¹ I suspect that becoming 'aware of our racial position' is not enough. Certainly for many of my students 'being aware' of white privilege led to feelings of guilt and while some were able to relate to the 'other' more sensitively, their experiences did not automatically lead to taking up anti-racist positions. For me, the obvious question, of course is, 'where to from here?' As a teacher educator I want to take up the implications of this: how can we move beyond the position of 'guilty liberals' and position ourselves to rearticulate whiteness in anti-essentialist terms? Or put another way: 'what subjectivities or

²⁹ Gillespie, *op cit.*, p. 249.

³⁰ Jane Kenway, *Re-visions: feminist theories and education*, Deakin University, 1992.

³¹ James J. Scheurich, 'Towards a Discourse on White Racism', *Educational Researcher*, November, 1993, pp. 5-16.

points of identification become available to [whites] who can only imagine white experience as monolithic, self-contained and deeply racist?'³² Others have articulated these concerns. For example, Gillespie and her co-authors' question 'How do [we] be anti-racist without appearing anti-white?' certainly strikes a cord with me.³³

I do not have any ready answers, nor do I wish to be prescriptive. However, the work of Beverly Daniel Tatum provides one of the keys. Tatum argues that: 'the restoration of hope is an essential part of the learning process. Otherwise students, both white and of colour, become immobilised in their own despair'.³⁴ She talks about various models or stages of whiteness and suggests that the 'model of the white ally' which is embedded in the histories of white protests against racism, is one that must be made available to students if they are to transcend what she calls 'the guilty white' model. Finding ways of doing this more effectively remains an on-going challenge. It is important for students to know that they can challenge oppression and take a stand against it: that they are 'needed and capable of being a good ally'.³⁵ To me, that is the challenge for educators: to work with students to become aware of white race privilege AND to provide them with strategies and resources to move beyond feelings of guilt, fear and alienation.

³² Giroux, *White Squalls*, p. 384.

³³ Gillespie, *op cit.* p. 240.

³⁴ Beverly Daniel Tatum, 'Teaching White Students about Racism: The Search for White Allies and the Restoration of Hope', *Teachers College Record*, 95, 1994, p. 471.

³⁵ Gloria Yamato, 'Something about the Subject makes it Hard to Name', *Making Face, Making Soul* in ed. Gloria Anzaldua, Aunt Lute Foundation Book, San Francisco, 1990, p. 423.