

Race in the Classroom: Identity Politics and Critical Pedagogies

Individual Abstracts

Talonda Lipsey-Brown, Ph.D.

A Qualitative Case Study on Teachers' Identities, Ideologies, and Commitment to Teach in Urban and Suburban Schools

Using narrative inquiry, this study employed a Critical Race Theory lens to examine the ways in which identity factors such as race, culture, socioeconomic status, and gender work in concession with teachers' ideologies, as demonstrated by their values, beliefs, and perceptions about race, to inform their teaching practices, experiences with students and families of color, and commitment to teach. The main question this research study sought to examine was: How do teachers' identities and ideologies, as demonstrated by their values, beliefs, and perceptions, influence their decisions to remain in or leave urban and suburban classrooms?

The study focused on the lived experiences of four teachers, two of whom taught in urban schools and two of whom taught in suburban schools. Based on the findings of this study, it is my contention that the ideologies espoused by my four participants all evolved from a source of pain, rooted in their identities and their experiences living in a racialized country. The ways in which they reacted, however, made all the difference. Each of the women's identity and their experiences with race, had a direct impact on their ideologies and the ways in which they interacted with their students. At times their experiences led them to operate from an activist stance, rendering them powerful, while at other times, their experiences caused them to function from a source of pain, thus rendering them powerless.

The following four recommendations were derived based on the findings of this study: the need for teachers to develop a clearer understanding with regard to the historical underpinnings, permanence and pervasiveness of racism in America; the need for teachers to become self-reflective about their identities and the ways it relates to privilege and whiteness; the need for teachers to develop a critical consciousness and seek alternative ways of understanding the world, particularly from the paradigms of the marginalized and oppressed; and the need for teachers, particularly teachers of color to continue to challenge majoritarian tales and forge alliances with White teachers who are committed to participating in the fight for equity.

Huining Ouyang, Ph.D.

Transforming Resistance: Strategies for Teaching Race in the Ethnic American Literature Classroom

During my 15-year long career of teaching ethnic American literature to predominantly white students at Edgewood College, I have often encountered the following pedagogical situation. While students express strong interest in ethnographic knowledge about cultures different from their own and demonstrate discernment in issues of gender or class oppression, many often experience significant discomfort when reading texts that engage in racial politics, especially representations of racism and xenophobia. Such discomfort manifests in various symptoms of resistance and evasion: students often attempt to redefine, universalize, or trivialize the issue, blame the victim, criticize the author, devalue the artistic quality of the given literary work, or ultimately downgrade the course or the instructor.

Student inability or unwillingness to confront issues of race and racism provides unique pedagogical challenges and opportunities. Why are white students unable or unwilling to engage in honest discussions of race and racism? What are the most effective praxis that will enable teachers and scholars to foster powerful, transformative learning in teaching antiracism to predominantly white students in the college classroom? In what ways can we create a constructive learning space that allows students to engage in open, thoughtful examinations of racial justice? How do we transform resistances, evasions, or controversies into "teaching moments"? Finally, how do we use literary studies as a forum to teach antiracism and cultivate commitment to social justice? These questions underlie my teaching and pedagogical research over the past few years.

In my essay, I will share the preliminary findings of my research. Focusing on my recent experiences of teaching such courses as Black Women Writers and Asian American Writers, I will demonstrate the ways in which pedagogical strategies can be deployed to enable students to dismantle white privilege and transform student experiences of learning and thinking about race in multiethnic literatures. I argue that by practicing an antiracist pedagogy, specifically by cultivating an open, engaged learning space, foregrounding identity constructions through course design and theoretical tools, and managing acts of resistance through collective self-reflections, we may begin to transform student learning about racial justice and cultivate commitment to antiracism and social change.

Sara F. Collas, Ph.D.

Last Night a Spiritual Saved My Life: Using Music to Teach about Race and Racism

My presentation will explore the ways in which music can be used to facilitate students' understanding of complex sociological ideas, such as the black freedom struggle, the loss of Indian land, life in the inner city, and racial domination and racial violence. Re-enacting the pedagogical strategies implemented in my Ethnic Studies and Sociologies courses, we will listen to music, analyze lyrics, and write spoken word poems in small groups. Through an interactive approach, I demonstrate the ways music from communities of color can create new learning and teaching opportunities for a diverse student population.

Panelists' Biographical Notes

Talonda Lipsey-Brown, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Education at Edgewood College. She teaches ED/ETHS 200: Education and Identity in a Pluralistic Society and ED 201 Teacher as Inquirer. Dr. Lipsey-Brown was educated in the Milwaukee Public School System, where she also served as a teacher. She earned her Bachelor of Science Degree in Biological Sciences from Marquette University, and she received her Master of Science Degree in Curriculum and Instruction and her doctorate in Urban Education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Dr. Lipsey-Brown's research explores teachers' identities, ideologies, and the impact of school climate on teachers' relationships with students of color in urban and suburban schools.

Huining Ouyang, Ph.D. is a Professor of English and the Director of the Center for Multicultural Education and the Ethnic Studies Program at Edgewood College. She teaches such courses as Asian American Writers, Black Women Writers, and Senior Seminar in Ethnic Studies. Her essays on Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna have appeared in *Alternative Rhetorics: Challenges to the Rhetorical Tradition* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), *Doubled Plots: Romance and History* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), and *MELUS: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* (Spring 2009). Her presentation at the CME Teaching for Diversity Series panel (Fall 2014) is based on her essay, "Transforming Resistance: Strategies for Teaching Race in the Ethnic American Literature Classroom," which has been recently published in *Understanding and Dismantling Privilege, Special Issue: Resistance to Teaching Antiracism* (August 2014).

Sara Collas, Ph.D. is a Lecturer in the School of Integrative Studies at Edgewood College. She teaches such courses as Introduction to Ethnic Studies, Diverse Landscapes in U.S. Culture, and Introduction to Sociology. In 2010 she was an Engaged Fellow at Edgewood College. This gave her the opportunity to conduct research on an aspect of her teaching that involved students conducting field research, taking field notes, and writing a paper based on their findings. She found this was a highly effective method facilitating the learning of sociological ideas, such as inequality, racism and racial domination, and power