White Women Teaching White Women about White Privilege, Race Cognizance and Social Action: toward a pedagogical pragmatics

DIANE GILLESPIE, LESLIE ASHBAUGH, & JOANN DEFIORE
University of Washington, Bothell, Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, 18115 Campus Way NE, Box 358530, Bothell, Washington 98011–8246, USA
(e-mail: dianegil@u.washington.edu)

ABSTRACT   *In this article, the authors describe a four-phase pedagogical project they undertook in response to the strong resistance they encountered from a number of their white women students who objected to the readings and discussions of white skin privilege. In an interdisciplinary program where 73% of the students are white women, the authors teach upper-level university social science courses that include the study of racism. White women themselves, the authors found their stories of students' resistance to be useful springboards for reflection. Reading and discussing the literature on teaching about whiteness as they worked with their stories, the authors were able to reframe their own initial concerns about how to read their students' discontent. This article reviews key themes from the literature on student resistance in anti-racist classrooms, describes the interview process the authors used to elicit each other's teaching stories, analyzes five of these stories, and presents some of the approaches that they developed to better reach their students.*

As white women teachers, we came together out of common concern: a number of our white women students were responding in unproductive ways when we taught about whiteness and privilege. Each of us covers this material as a part of the social science curricula in an interdisciplinary program for junior and senior university students. Prior to our work together, we were feeling increasingly isolated in face of accusations such as 'You're just white bashing.' This article describes the process of a pedagogical collaboration that we developed to respond to this observed pattern of resistance from white middle-class women students when they study white skin privilege (McIntosh, 1988, 1989). We also offer the fruit of our collaboration: new practices that have reinvigorated our teaching.

Veterans of multicultural classrooms, with years of teaching about social inequality and racial injustice between us, we have dealt with our share of student resistance. However, the type of resistance we were facing from our white women

students seemed more intense and led to distracting classroom dynamics and office visits. In class, students spoke up more frequently in opposition, and we learned of student groups complaining outside of our classes. We attributed the new quality of this resistance to our expanded coverage of whiteness and white skin privilege in our courses, our gender, and our new teaching setting—a white, middle-class suburban university in the Northwest. We began this collaborative project so that we could attend more carefully to what we were experiencing as resistance, interrogate our assumptions about the meanings of these experiences, and create more effective curricular materials for teaching about privilege, not just to our white women students but to all our students.

Several features in our situation interacted, we suspected, to create new elements in the resistance we faced. There are few students or faculty of color on our campus. Our class size (44–50 students) prevents more in-depth sharing among students. Many of our courses have generic titles and are not explicitly designated as anti-racist courses, so students may feel surprised by our inclusion of anti-racist coursework. In informal interviews with our white women students, we found that few had any experience with either people of color or white people who have served as allies to people of color. Further, they said that they had assumed that our similarities to them would result in course experiences amenable to their own views about race.

We focused our attention on our white middle-class women students because of their sheer numbers in our classroom. Their majority status seemed to give them more power to vocalize their opposition, both in and out of class. We were influenced by Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) findings that the white women she interviewed used power evasive language (p. 239), and we wanted to follow out the implications of such evasion for our classroom practice. We should note that we all introduced the study of racism and privilege by stating that oppression and dominance are what is at issue—not race, which is a meaningless category—except as it has been (and continues to be) constructed to maintain present hierarchical unjust power relations. Our struggle was practical. What curricular materials and pedagogical practices might lead to more fruitful interactions with our students?

We investigated our teaching of white privilege through narrative and narrative analysis. Van Manen (1990) argues that stories are 'important for pedagogy in that they function as experiential case material on which pedagogic reflection is possible' (pp. 120–121). Narrative methodology allows for the discovery of new meanings in past actions; these new meanings can then evoke new possibilities for future action. As Polkinghorne (1988) notes, 'The realization 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' (p. 154). Our stories engaged our aspirations as anti-racist teachers, revealed specific details about our teaching about white privilege, and created new interpretations of our students' resistance. As we shared our stories, certain ones became centerpieces for our interpretative work. Further, we wanted to attempt what Webb (2001) calls 'dialogic reflection,' conversations that could help us think through issues with each other, break down our isolation (p. 155), and help us envision new practices.

   Our collaboration involved four phases. In the first phase, we read and discussed the growing literature on white skin privilege, white women and race, and student resistance. In the second phase, we conducted semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews with one another. We told our stories of disconnections, points where we felt women students cut us off, withdrew prematurely from us and/or the class, or stayed stuck in one line of thought. In the third phase, we wrote up our stories (from the interview) and our reflections about them. We then chose two of our own stories and wrote reflections about them. We used the stories and the reflections to further our collaborative deliberations. In the fourth phase, out of our discussions, we developed a 'pedagogical pragmatics' (Laff, 2000), a set of more purposeful strategies for teaching about whiteness and privilege. Before turning to the stories, reflections, and strategies, we review the literature that helped us frame and interpret our experiences.

Whiteness/White Skin Privilege and Student Resistance

Scholars in many fields have devoted considerable attention to the challenges of teaching an anti-racist curriculum. (In education, see, for example, Paley, 1979; Sleeter & Grant, 1987; Weiler, 1988; Helms, 1990, 1995; Cochran-Smith, 1991, 1995a, 1995b, 1999, 2000; Tatum, 1992, 1994, 1997; hooks, 1994; Sleeter, 1994; Banks, 1996; Frankenberg, 1997; Giroux, 1997; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; McIntyre, 1997; Rosenberg, 1997; Howard, 1999; Nieto, 1999; Schick, 2000; Levine-Rasky, 2000. In sociology, see, for example, Bohmer & Briggs, 1991; Thompson & Disch, 1992; Lucal, 1996.) Most acknowledge that student resistance is reinforced by the invisibility of white privilege. Weiler (1988) puts it this way: 'Since white privilege is so much a defined part of U.S. society, whites are not even conscious of their relationship to power and privilege. In U.S. society, white is the norm; people of color are defined as deviating from that norm' (pp. 76–77). Frankenberg (1997) notes that educators often face more resistance when they teach about white privilege than they do when they teach about racism. She states, 'White people's conscious racialization of others does not necessarily lead to a conscious racialization of the white self. Indeed, … whiteness makes itself invisible precisely by asserting its normalcy, its transparency, in contrast with the marking of others on which its transparency depends' (p. 6).
   When we questioned students after they had taken our classes, they told us that the initial recognition of privilege created anxiety, guilt, and embarrassment. To ameliorate such feelings, they said that they tried to adopt the 'colorblind' position (Frankenberg, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Scholfield, 1997). This position assumes that race should be discounted in explanations of how people are treated, but as Frankenberg, Ladson-Billings and Scholfield argue, such a position has serious consequences, including denying differential treatment and ignoring culturally relevant information. When our students heard criticisms of the colorblind position, they said that they then thought that the white privilege argument was 'anti-white.' So the question that loomed large for Howard (1999) as a white educator came to

loom large for us: 'How do [we] be anti-racist without appearing anti-White?' (p. 27)

The students' inferences and conclusions reminded us that anti-racist pedagogy has multiple dangers, including the very formulation of race itself. In her study of the outcomes of an anti-racist curriculum in teacher education, for example, Schick (2000) found that exposure to anti-racist pedagogy produced a liberal discourse, the aim of which seemed to be to maintain a 'positive self-presentation' (p. 88). The students that she interviewed in her study had learned that anti-racist language was part of the qualifications for the education profession, so they 'affirmed[ed] their subject positions as qualified teachers whose liberal goodness includes being non prejudiced' (p. 95). Such findings show how language can serve as a veneer, covering over complicity, apathy and fear. In Levine-Rasky's (2000) criticism of white privilege, she finds that students may avoid owning their own complicity in systems of oppression and injustice by simply admitting their privilege; the 'confession' of their privilege 'fulfils [a] redemptive function' (p. 276). Such outcomes remind us that many white students will attempt to reinterpret any pedagogical strategy that disrupts their sense of entitlement and comfort.

Levine-Rasky levels strong cautions about white privilege pedagogy, the study of unearned advantages and entitlements enjoyed by whites as members of the dominant racial group. Citing its reductionistic emphasis, Levine-Rasky argues, 'Framing whiteness … essentially involves a people rather than a set of social relations. The project becomes one that is about whites rather than the process of white racialization and domination' (p. 285). She warns that student resistance is a well-known outcome of this pedagogy and that it produces defensiveness on the part of white students who are then prevented from understanding '*how* whiteness is elaborated in the social order' (p. 274). In making her case, we find that Levine-Rasky oversimplifies white privilege pedagogy and misses the dialectical intent of authors such as McIntosh (1988), whose work responded historically to the limited focus of multiculturalism in US education on the ramifications of racial oppression for people of color. Levine-Rasky rightly points out, however, as do other critics (Giroux, 1997), that white privilege is not an end but a means to an integrated, holistic analysis of social, political, and economic relationships that continue to reproduce racial oppression. And she concludes that her argument for 'a collective dimension' (p. 287) to the study of whiteness still means there will be tensions in the classroom.

Such tensions mean that anti-racist teaching and learning will always be effortful. Kumashiro (2000) argues that '*a particular kind of labor*' (p. 42, italics in original) is needed in anti-oppressive education (e.g. one that destabilizes or helps to change oppressive socio-economic circumstances). Both teachers and students must make conscious efforts to alter language practices (e.g. stereotypes, myths, citations) that reify existing power relations. Such language practices serve to legitimate those in power by making those with power seem deserving and the powerless not so. When such traditional assumptions are questioned, students feel cautious and anxious; they may not have new words. And many have not asked for new frames of reference and would not choose such a course of study. Kumashiro (2000) states, 'It could … be argued that we unconsciously desire to learn only that which affirms

our sense that we are good people and that we resist learning anything that reveals our complicity with racism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression' (p. 43). Learning new frames of reference is difficult enough, but when those new frames require students to unlearn old habits of thought, teaching and learning are 'very labor intensive' (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 8). And for us, part of the labor involves working with our students' gendered expectations of us and remnants of our own traditional gender socialization—to make others comfortable and to assuage unpleasant feelings.

White Women/White Privilege

In recent years, scholars (e.g. McIntosh, 1988, 1989; Frankenberg, 1993; McIntyre, 1997; Haggis *et al.*, 1999) have focused specifically on white women and their complicity in a racist system. Race shapes our lives as white women in ways that continue to be imperceptible to us. Even women involved in anti-racist work often consider their work an act of compassion for the 'other' rather than an issue integral to their own lives. We have found that our students' perspectives generally fall into the categories that Frankenberg (1993) found in her study of white women. The white women she interviewed tended to think about race in one of three ways: essentialist racism, color and power evasion (e.g. the colorblind position discussed above), and race cognizance. The first position sees race as a determinant and explanation of human behavior; the second recognizes color but then, in an appeal to abstract moral principles, dismisses it as a determinant of how people are treated. The third position recognizes the complexities of context, the ways in which race can interact with socio-economic status to predetermine in advance the meanings and realities of one's identity and experiences.

In her response to Frankenberg's findings about white women, Collins (1995) notes that very few white women in the study were race cognizant. Some accounts of gender socialization (e.g. Gilligan, 1982; Belenky *et al.*, 1986; Tannen, 1990) have shown that women tend to be socialized to avoid conflict, often remaining silent when they feel their opinions might cut them off from others or, more dramatically, invite physically violent responses. In their discussion of white women working against racism, Tatum and Knaplund (1996) explore white women's fears about 'stepping outside the circle' of privilege in relational terms. The women interviewed in their study often perceived that speaking out about racism was risky. We hypothesized that we were struggling as race cognizant white women with white women students who were operating from essentialist racist or color- and power-evasion standpoints. But more, did their lack of experiences with anti-racist white women lead them to feel skeptical about us and betrayed by the persistence of our arguments for race cognizance?

Stories of Our Students' Resistance

The stories that we told during our interviews were those of resistance, and they often contained several layers of pedagogical struggle with white, middle-class,

female students. We do not struggle with all our female students. Indeed, during our collaboration, over 500 students were in our courses. In the concentration in which we teach, called Society, Ethics and Human Behavior, during spring 2001, 84% of the 183 students were female and 69% where white (although 20 students of the 183 students did not respond to this category). In a survey of all students in our interdisciplinary program conducted in October 2000, 66% of 376 students reported having a monthly income of $1500 or more (45% claimed $4000 or more). On the campus as a whole, students of color comprise about 20%; of those, 15% are Asian-American. We have students in all age ranges and most work full- or part-time. The campus—a commuter one—draws its students from the surrounding, largely white, middle-class suburban neighborhoods. Our suburban setting may be somewhat atypical, but it allowed us to focus more specifically on the resistance of our white, middle-class, female students, a population increasingly well represented in US institutions of higher education.

To illustrate our narrative approach, each author tells her own story of feeling disconnected from a student or class and the meanings she made of it. We then jointly reflect on each story's implications for our practice. It is out of this process of telling and interpreting that we recognized how some of our practices were actually counterproductive given our aims. As themes emerged from our narratives, we were able to create new strategies for teaching about white privilege.

Story 1: Appearances Count

> *Recently, a white female student came to my office to discuss some issues from my class entitled 'Meanings and Realities of Inequality.' At the time, we were reading about white privilege. The student and I were talking about how white students and white teachers converse about race and racism, discussing our own classroom dynamics. She said to me, 'You know, for me it was your black hair that made it OK for you to be talking about race to us. Yes, definitely, the dark black hair and the fact that you are an Italian from the East coast. Those two features really made a difference to me. I could not trust someone who was tall, fair, you know … blonde.*
>
> *In this story, I see how my ethnicity—100% Southern Italian—has shaped my teaching strategies when I teach about race, racism and white privilege. It has been only recently and in this mostly white Northwest context that I have begun to explore my ethnicity and how it has played an important yet conflicting role in my ability to reach out to white students. As a result of reading Maria Laurino (2001)* Were You Always Italian? Ancestors and Other Icons of Italian America, *I realized that my interest in race and racism might have as much to do with my ethnic heritage as it has to do with my understanding unearned white privilege sociologically.*
>
> *On the first day of this course, I tell my students about my ethnic background as a way of alerting them to the issues they will be dealing with in this class. In doing so, I set myself apart. Like many of them, I am white, yet I am a pure ethnic: all four grandparents stem from the same region in Southern Italy. Thus,*

there was considerable homogeneity in my ethnic upbringing because all of my grandparents (all of whom are still living) and thus both my parents had very similar values and traditions: Catholicism, family, and food. When I talk about grandparents and the Italian dialect they would use, the Sunday evening 3 pm required family meals, going to Mass, the unusual menus we had for holidays such as Thanksgiving, my students view me as someone who has a culture, an ethnicity. When asked about their own racial-ethnic background, several of my white students have responded, 'I don't have one.' Others have said, 'I am a mutt, a little bit of everything.' Many do not see themselves as having a culture, let alone a racial identity.

Yet, when we start the readings on whiteness, I identify myself as white by illustrating unfair advantages I have gained by being white. Even though white students can also identify with me as a white person in these situations, it is difficult for me because I can also recount racist incidents and social denigration that my own extended family members faced because they were Italian.

As we discussed JoAnn's story, we realized how much our appearance counts and how students' personal evaluations make us self-conscious. The process of teaching about privilege is intensely personal. Diane and Leslie are the 'tall, fair, you know … blonde' teachers that JoAnn's student would not have trusted. And how our students judge us by our looks may interact with or depend on what and how we self-disclose as we model anti-racist positions. The evaluation of such personal aspects of our teaching reveals the basic level of our struggles for remaining connected to our students who, according to the white women we have informally interviewed, reported that they frequently questioned our legitimacy to teach about race and privilege.

Story 2: Disclosing Race Cognizance

In the first session of my upper division course entitled, 'Gender, Work and Family,' my personal introduction to white privilege often includes a description of my journey to work on any given day. By choice, I reside in a racially integrated, working-class neighborhood in the south end of the city, approximately 20 miles from our suburban campus. It is identified frequently in the media as the only integrated neighborhood in the state of Washington. On my drive to school, I rarely escape racialized moments.

To introduce white privilege in one class, I told my students about a seemingly innocuous exchange. Already very late, I beeped my horn at an African-American teen that was standing out in the street directly in my path. He was not moving out of the way. In the ensuing eye contact, our mutual frustration was evident. 'Yeah, you go white lady,' he yelled, angry at my honking. What was really about my own tardiness and impatience became racialized; he thought I was being rude to him because he was black. And I had to check myself out as a white woman, 'Would I have honked at a young white man? Yes, of course, I would have honked at anyone in my way.'

> *This story introduces my students to white privilege and to me as someone who thinks about race on a daily basis. And after I told this story, I knew that many white women in the class would now see me as someone very different from them. From their journals, I know that my students chose to live in more homogeneous white neighborhoods and that they stigmatize the part of town I live in—that it is violent and poor. I speak personally in order to break the ice with a new group, blur the dichotomy between public and private, and gain credibility with my students. Yet I feel that I am losing credibility at first. I know from past experience that this is the first time many white women students have heard someone address the 'race problem' in such personal and candid terms.*

Through Leslie's story, we uncovered the emotional labor identified by Kumashiro (2001) as necessary to present a differing interpretation of power relations in this society. Bringing the private into the public realm of the classroom, we model our own invisible privilege: 'How could I not be racist living in a society that organizes its daily practices on the basis of race?' Of course, we know when we make that statement we disrupt some of our students' senses of normalcy: 'But racists are those mean people out there, not in here teaching me.' In so using our experiences from the private realm—our own emotional struggles to act justly and remain race cognizant—we open up our actions for interpretation and misinterpretation. And the white women students we interviewed suggested, as they reflected back on their experiences in our courses, that they felt betrayed, especially at first, by our candidness. They felt close to us, identified with us because we used personal experience in our teaching. But then, when white skin privilege came to the forefront and our experiences were about our unearned privilege, they disconnected. And many disconnected even more when we continued to ask them to reconsider their appeals to the colorblind position.

Story 3: Vulnerability and Self-disclosure

> *Returning to school after a very successful career in advertising, Mary expressed her excitement about taking my course, Individual and Society, because it promised to be different from her business courses. Treating me as a colleague and peer, she visited my office on several occasions during the first two weeks and freely offered feedback about the class. When reading about class and classism, she confided to me privately that she struggled with her privilege. But during the third week of class, she burst into my office, clearly upset and angry, and announced she would have to drop the course. 'I had trusted that you were different from all the other so-called "white bashers,"' she said. 'I thought this course was going to be different and I am disappointed.'*
>
> *Startled and shaken by her remarks, I backtracked through the course to see what might have led her to this conclusion. Until this point, Mary had felt comfortable in my classroom and safe with the content of the course—with its inclusion of gay and lesbian literature, works by women of color such as bell hooks—largely because she identified with me as a white professional woman. I*

had self-disclosed on a variety of topics including my own working-class back-ground in the military, my frustrations with a bigoted grandfather, and my own struggles to overcome racism, sexism and class bias. Something about my presentation of white skin privilege had broken her trust. I had violated the terms of our relationship. I simultaneously model consciousness of my prejudices and their roots and extend the hand of intimacy to my students, including personal visits just like the one she was making then.

So I asked Mary about the basis of her discomfort. She said that she had assumed that, like her, I had overcome a great many obstacles and earned my place of privilege through hard and honest labor. Mary was not prepared for what she called my 'betrayal' of her, as I owned my own unearned white privilege and my complicity in a system of institutionalized oppression. I was no longer like her and did not share her values after all. As in every other racialized situation she had experienced, Mary said that she was going to have to 'watch what she said.'

The intensity of her identification surprised me. In response, I articulated a distinction between owning my own white privilege and so called 'white-bashing' by defining for Mary an alternate white identity that is anti-racist and proactive in changing societal circumstances. After several interactions, Mary chose to remain in the course.

Leslie's story highlighted for all of us the paradox of our situation: the realization that in an almost all-white campus we rely on white skin privilege, to some degree, to gain credibility with some of our white students. The more students can identity with us in a way that is non-threatening to them, the more likely they are to take our invitation to explore their own complicity in a racist system. But then, as students become uncomfortable, they may expect us to care for them as they assert either an essentialist view of race or the colorblind position. We are aware that our own internalized sexism may unconsciously encourage us to manage discomfort, alleviate pain, and re-establish conviviality. When we teach students about oppression and they quite rightly become agitated, many might assume that we will know how to reduce their feelings of discomfort. We feel responsible, too, given our egalitarian teaching philosophy: all students should feel cared for as human beings when they voice unpopular positions. Yet, some views are more privileged in the culture and thus are more powerful in the classroom. We walk a fine line in challenging and engaging our students while not losing them altogether.

As mentioned throughout, our emotional labor includes our willingness to plunge into personal histories to reveal to our students what it means to be race cognizant. Our self-disclosure exposes us in our other social roles as wives, mothers, daughters, aunts, as well as professional workers. Many students identify explicitly with us in these roles (as Mary did with Leslie). So the other danger is that students over-identify with us and think that they can make a difference personally and that such individual efforts will be enough. The resistance to participating in larger social change efforts is masked by their good intentions in their individual relationships.

Story 4: Romanticized Interpretations of Our Anti-Racist Work

'You know, Dr Gillespie,' the student said as she sat back in her chair in my office, 'what has stood out to me from the class is the story that you told us about your father. It was like you became real to me—as a white woman and an anti-racist—for the first time. I had never really been exposed to the kind of information we were studying.' And as she recalled the class, I too remembered standing before my students who were frightened by their despair at the recognition of white skin privilege. 'It's all so overwhelming. How do we make a difference here?' they asked, voices importunate. I suddenly started speaking about my father, who on his deathbed told my sister and me that we had changed him, that he was no longer a racist 'in his mind.' He recanted, feeling terrible about the way he had thought most of his life. I had never told this story in a classroom before, and I found myself welling up unexpectedly at the memory of his testimony.

I realized I had never thought about this event as a critical part in my own antiracist work—in fact, his racism had been what had fueled my own racial identity development. And, in that same moment, I realized how insignificant the story was as a response to their need for identifying social action groups. It took me a few moments to regain my composure in front of the class. And sure enough, it was the emotion of those moments that the student recalled. 'For the first time I could see what my own role might be given all the readings we've done on racism,' she said.

In Diane's story, we discovered that our students' identification with us as daughters, wives, and mothers could be seductive to us, as it is flattering when students want to do something they perceive as difficult because of one's actions as a teacher. Dwelling on the personal, however, can inadvertently devalue the need for our white middle-class women students to undertake and participate in larger social reform movements. The pressure can be subtle: as an anti-racist, I will teach my daughter not to stereotype people, I will now stop my grandfather from saying explicitly racist things to my children, and so forth. The emotional work of the classroom involves us in multiple levels—from hearing about their own personal accounts of their experiences to encouraging their engagement in more activist stances in larger public arenas. Few of our students have had such experiences in social activism, but some have, and through this project we have become more aware of the importance of uncovering and working with the real diversity among our white women students.

Story 5: Students as Allies in Anti-racist Work in the Classroom

I introduced the course 'The Meanings and Realities of Inequality' by having students read Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism *(Mohanty et al., 1991). They knew that this would be followed by* White Women, Race Matters *(Frankenberg, 1993). Within a matter of a few class periods, I began to hear indirectly of complaints about 'white bashing.' I asked them to bear with the readings and hoped that eventually they would move past this reactive*

response. Trying to get them to talk about such reactions, I asked the class (35 students) to put their chairs in a large circle for discussion. However, each time, these discussions became more and more problematic for me because I would open up the discussion and would be met with silence.

Troubled by the silence, I experimented. I probed and asked leading questions; I removed myself from the circle; I gave them discussion questions ahead of time; I changed the position of the chairs. Nothing improved these discussions and I began to dread having them. Clearly, the students were not willing to discuss the material; they did not trust me. Yet, on the day that I had decided to give up discussions, something happened. Since the students had discussion questions in advance, I had removed myself from the circle. A student (I'll call her Amy) from my multicultural family class the quarter before, spoke up. Again, silence. A student here and there made a brief comment, but there was no discussion. Finally, Amy burst out, 'Listen folks, I know this is hard to talk about. I know it's hard to talk about race and power and privilege, but we have to. It's important.'

Then three other students who had also been in my family class began to open up and talk more. Amy became the unofficial facilitator. She gently pointed out to other students the covert racism in some of the comments, and the discussion ensued and many students got involved.

JoAnn's story stimulated us to think systematically about the role proactive white women could potentially play in our efforts to remain connected with more resistant students. Although few, several of our students have been allies to people of color and those of us working with white skin privilege in the very way Frances E. Kendall (2000) defines them: 'Allies work continuously to develop an understanding of the personal and institutional experiences of the person or people with whom they are aligning themselves' (p. 1); in this case, people of color. The participation of biracial students and white students in interracial relationships continues to play an important role in our class interactions for white students who resist the study of racism and privilege.

Pedagogical Pragmatics

Three themes emerged from our analysis of our stories of struggle. First, we were teaching about white privilege in such a way that our students questioned our legitimacy to teach about race and privilege. Second, they felt they had to disconnect from us when they felt implicated in a system of racial privilege. And third, once they were disconnected, we did not know how to reconnect them back into course material in such a way that they felt ownership of the learning lessons or able to expand on their meanings for their own lives. We roped them back in, if at all, through our emotional labor in the classroom; our personal interest and involvement with them were all that we had to keep them involved, even if marginally.

The last part of our collaboration engaged us in radically redesigning the ways we teach white privilege in our courses. In the remainder of our article, we share specific

classroom practices that have transformed how our students respond to this material. We believe these practices will be valuable for other instructors who, like us, want to rethink how they teach privilege to predominantly white, middle-class students. They may also serve as springboards for groups beginning to collaborate about how they teach race and privilege. Even though we have focused on one group of students—white women—we do not see these practices as only applicable to them, and we extend the same principles to our work with other students.

(1) We have developed specific material to highlight the contributions of anti-racist, race cognizant white women and the social contexts out of which they emerged. For example, we created our own racial histories which we make available to our students, either online or in print. We have taken the weight off ourselves. Even when our courses do not allow for readings of entire autobiographies of white women anti-racists, such as Lois Stalvey's (1989) *The Education of a WASP* or Siegel's (1994) *Murder on the Highway: the Viola Luizzo story*, we have students learn briefer versions of these women's lives. We have used films such as *The Long Walk Home* (Koch & Pearce, 1991), which tells the story of a white woman in the 1950s who becomes race cognizant. Giroux's (1997) criticism of *Dangerous Minds* as deeply racist stimulates students to think about their own images of anti-racist whites (see also Crawford *et al.* [1990] for stories of white women in the civil rights movement). We are now working on extending our coverage of white women who have advocated for the rights of different racial/ethnic groups. Our guiding question with such materials has become: how have these women integrated race cognizance (if it is present) and their actions in public efforts to dismantle racism?

We invite our former white women students (and male students too) who have gone through a process of rethinking their white privilege to come to our classes in panels to speak about what the experience meant for them in the context of new anti-racist actions they have undertaken in public life. We also invite former white women students who are or have been in multiracial/biracial relationships to speak about their experiences with white privilege; they report often that they lose their privilege as a result of their association with people of color.

(2) We assign students reflective writing assignments (Thompson & Tyagi, 1996) and have them collaborate about the similarities and differences in their experiences and contexts (Webb, 2001). In journal entries or autobiographical essays, students narrate their own racial history and examine their racial identity development in light of the experiences of other whites to examine the contexts out of which anti-racist behaviors and attitudes emerge. They also analyze the role of class, sexual orientation, and gender socialization in their racial development and explore how they intersect. After such reflective writing, we have had white women students conduct interviews with people of color about their racial identity development. Such experiences often produce contrasts (as well as similarities) and dramatic changes in the students' self-reported understandings of race and privilege.

(3) As students learn about white privilege, we underscore, as we did prior to this project, in our lectures and through our reading assignments, the macro-issues involved in racism and privilege: patterns of inequality and privilege are pervasive, relentless, and actually widening in many facets of US life. We are now more explicit

in demonstrating the patterns of inequality and the intersections of race with gender, class, and sexual orientation. For example, Weber's (2001) text, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality*, includes a set of hard-hitting, descriptive statistics at the beginning of her text (which one can use as a model for creating one's own information). She also includes historical time lines for such areas as education, citizenship, and government so that students can see that 'the struggles of oppressed groups for full inclusion in a democratic society have been continuous' (p. 34). Models of multiple levels of oppression and empowerment (Howard, 1999; Collins, 2000; Gaine, 2000) are also important for students to understand how different types of oppression interact to complicate simple responses. As Gaine (2000) states, 'Racism operates at different levels, none of which can be singled out as the most important for action because of their intricate interdependence' (p. 79).

We talk directly about the processes that create and maintain such social inequalities. For example, in *The Meaning of Difference* Rosenblum and Travis (2000) delineate the processes of stigmatization and connect that process to oppression and privilege. The video, *A Class Divided* (Peters, 1986), can initiate discussions about how a system of dominance, once established, perpetuates itself.

What has been reinforced most from our collaboration is our need to remind students that the issue is not whiteness per se but dominance. Howard (1999) explains theories of social dominance and then links those theories to racism and privilege. For example, he states how important it is for whites to understand that:

> the 'enemy' is dominance itself, not White people. This distinction becomes blurred at times precisely because of the overwhelming convergence of Whiteness and dominance in Western nations. … If we were to broaden the focal point and look at the universal history of human suffering caused by arrangements of dominance and racism, there are many stories to be told, and the villains have not always been White. (p. 27)

We are much more explicit, then, with our students about the fact that changing 'Whiteness' is not the issue, that guilt and shame are not the ends of our curriculum but, rather, our joint thoughtfulness about how our society might dismantle its historical practices of social injustice (see Ellsworth [1997] for a discussion of the double binds of whiteness).

(4) To bring reflection and understanding into action, we employ informal role-playing toward the end of our courses. Role-playing exercises can help students practice integrating new knowledge into their everyday actions; they can engage in ordinary situations differently, often by trying something new. For example, one of us asked students to play out different possible responses in the following situation: a white onlooker witnesses a racist comment or act by a white person to a person of color. (Such experiences readily emerge from the class.) The students make a number of suggestions for intervention, and then they assess the effectiveness of various types of anti-racist actions. (We also use Forum Theater, a version of Theater of the Oppressed developed by Augusto Boal. For a full description of how to use this technique in class, see Brown & Gillespie, 1997, 1999). Through

role-playing, students can practice various responses in situations many of which derive from their own experience.

(5) We supplement in-class practices with projects that require students to take anti-racist action outside the classroom so that they can see themselves in positions to make a difference in their communities, both personally and politically, and to take risks. For example, students can engage in service-learning projects. One student volunteered for over 20 hours at CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) wherein she witnessed first hand how the court system works with abused and neglected children, many of whom are children of color.

(6) All facets of our approach have been supported by our collaboration together. We found sustenance in our struggle to teach transformatively and felt rejuvenated as we looked anew at our practices in light of our stories. Prior to our work together, we had been isolated in our new university context and had never systematically collaborated with other white women about teaching about race and privilege. Being able to discuss, frankly and honestly, these issues with each other has emboldened us, both to be more critical of our own practices and to experiment with new strategies and approaches. Tatum and Knaplund (1996) described white women doing anti-racist teaching as 'stepping outside the circle,' and although there are risks, they, like us, found sustaining 'connections to others on the same path' (p. 7). We wish to teach in such a way that all our students can generate rich and lasting connections with others as they work against racial injustice. However, we think that such connections are especially important for those white, middle-class women students, who, until they are sitting in our classes, have not been invited to consider their white privilege.

Acknowledgements

References

BANKS, J.A. (Ed.) (1996) *Multicultural Education, Transformative Knowledge, and Action* (New York, Teachers College Press).

BELENKY, M.F., CLINCHY, B.M., GOLDBERGER, N.R. & TARULE, J.M. (1986) *Women's Ways of Knowing: the development of self, voice, and mind* (New York, Basic Books).

BOHMER, S. & BRIGGS, J.L. (1991) Teaching privileged students about gender, race, and class oppression, *Teaching Sociology*, 19, pp. 154–163.

BROWN, K.H. & GILLESPIE, D. (1997) 'We become brave by doing brave acts': teaching moral courage through Theater of the Oppressed, *Literature and Medicine*, 16, pp. 108–120.

BROWN, K.H. & GILLESPIE, D. (1999) Responding to moral distress in the university: Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed, *Change*, September/October, pp. 35–39.

COCHRAN-SMITH, M. (1991) Learning to teach against the grain, *Harvard Educational Review*, 51, pp. 279–310.

COCHRAN-SMITH, M. (2000) Blind vision: unlearning racism in teacher education, *Harvard Educational Review*, 70, pp. 157–190.

COCHRAN-SMITH, M. (1995a) Color blindness and basket making are not the answers: con-

fronting the dilemmas of race, culture, and language diversity in teacher education, *American Educational Research Journal*, 32, pp. 493–522.

COCHRAN-SMITH, M. (1995b) Uncertain allies: understanding the boundaries of race and teaching, *Harvard Educational Review*, 65, pp. 541–570.

COCHRAN-SMITH, M. (1999) Learning to teach for social justice, in: G. GRIFFIN (Ed.) *98th Yearbook of NSSE: teacher education for a new century: emerging perspectives, promising practices, and future possibilities* (Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press).

COLLINS, P.H. (1995) Review of the book *White Women, Race Matters: the social construction of whiteness*, *Signs*, 20, pp. 728–731.

COLLINS, P.H. (2000) *Black Feminist Thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, 2nd edn (New York, Routledge).

CRAWFORD, V.L., ROUSE, J.A. & WOODS, B. (Eds) (1990) *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: trailblazers and torchbearers, 1941–1965* (Brooklyn, NY, Carlson).

ELLSWORTH, E. (1997) Double binds of whiteness, in: M. FINE, L. WEIS, L. C. POWELL & L. M. WONG (Eds) *Off White: readings on race, power, and society*, pp. 259–269 (New York, Routledge).

FRANKENBERG, R. (1993) *White Women, Race Matters: the social construction of whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press).

FRANKENBERG, R. (Ed.) (1997) *Displacing Whiteness: essays in social and cultural criticism* (Durham, SC, Duke University Press).

GAINE, C. (2000) Anti-racist education in 'white' areas: the limits and possibilities of change, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 3, pp. 65–81.

GILLIGAN, C. (1982) *In a Different Voice: psychological theory and women's development* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press).

GIROUX, H.A. (1997) Rewriting the discourse of racial identity: towards a pedagogy and politics of whiteness, *Harvard Educational Review*, 67, pp. 285–320.

HAGGIS, J., SCHECH, S., & FITZGERALD, G. (1999) Narrating lives, narrating whiteness: a research note, *Journal of Australian Studies*, March, pp. 168–175.

HELMS, J. E. (Ed.) (1990) *Black and White Racial Identity: theory, research, and practice* (Westport, CT, Greenwood Press).

HELMS, J.E. (1995) An update of Helms's white and people of color racial identity models, in: J. G. PONTEROTTO, J. M. CASAS, L. A. SUZUKI & C. M. ALEXANDER (Eds) *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling* (Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage).

HOOKS, B. (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: education as the practice of freedom* (New York, Routledge).

HOWARD, G.R. (1999) *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: white teachers, multiracial schools* (New York, Teachers College Press).

KENDALL, F.E. (2000) How to be an ally if you are a person with privilege (Available from Frances E. Kendall, 960 Tulare Avenue, Albany, CA 94707, USA).

KOCH, H.W. (Director) & PEARCE, R. (Producer) (1991) *The Long Walk Home* [Film] (Available from Social Studies School Service, 10200 Jefferson Blvd., Box 802, Culver City, CA 90232, USA).

KUMASHIRO, K.K. (2000) Toward a theory of anti-oppressive education, *Review of Educational Research*, 70, pp. 25–53.

KUMASHIRO, K.K. (2001) 'Posts' perspective on anti-oppressive education in social studies, English, mathematics, and science classrooms, *Educational Researcher*, 30, pp. 3–12.

LADSON-BILLINGS, G. (1994) *The Dreamkeepers: successful teachers of African-American children* (San Francisco, CA, Jossey–Bass).

LAFF, N.S. (2000) Review of the book *White Reign: deploying whiteness in America*, *AAHE Bulletin*, 53(4), pp. 10–11.

LAURINO, M. (2001) *Were You Always Italian? Ancestors and Other Icons of Italian America* (New York, W. W. Norton).

LAWRENCE, S. & TATUM, B. (1997) Teachers in transition: the impact of antiracist professional development on classroom practice, *Teachers College Record*, 99, pp. 162–178.

LEVINE-RASKY, C. (2000) Framing whiteness: working through the tensions in introducing whiteness to educators, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 3, pp. 272–292.

LUCAL, B. (1996) Oppression and privilege: toward a relational conceptualization of race, *Teaching Sociology*, 24, pp. 245–255.

MCINTOSH, P. (1988) White privilege and male privilege: a personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies, *Work in Progress, No. 189* (Wellesley, MA, Stone Center Working Paper Series).

MCINTOSH, P. (1989) White privilege: unpacking the invisible knapsack, *Peace and Freedom*, 49(4), pp. 10–12.

MCINTYRE, A. (1997) *Making Meaning of Whiteness: exploring racial identity with white teachers* (New York, State University of New York Press).

MOHANTY, C.T., RUSSO, A. & TORRES, L. (Eds) (1991) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press).

NIETO, S. (1999) *The Light in their Eyes: creating multicultural learning communities* (New York, Teachers College Press).

PALEY, V. (1979) *White Teacher* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press).

PETERS, W. (Executive Producer) (1986) A class divided, *Frontline* (New York and Washington, DC, Public Broadcasting Service).

POLKINGHORNE, D. E. (1988) *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (New York, State University of New York Press).

ROSENBERG, P. (1997) Underground discourses: exploring whiteness in teacher education, in: M. FINE, L. WEIS, L. POWELL, & L. WONG (Eds) *Off White: readings on race and power in society*, pp. 79–86 (New York, Routledge).

ROSENBLUM, K.E. & TRAVIS, T.C. (2000) *The Meaning of Difference: American constructions of race, sex and gender, social class, and sexual orientation*, 2nd edn (New York, McGraw-Hill).

SCHICK, C. (2000). 'By virtue of being white': resistance in anti-racist pedagogy, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 3, pp. 83–102.

SCHOFIELD, J.W. (1997) Causes and consequences of the colorblind perspective, in: J. A. BANKS, & C. A. BANKS (Eds) *Multicultural Education: issues and perspectives*, 3rd edn, pp. 251–267 (Boston, MA, Allyn & Bacon).

SIEGEL, B. (1994) *Murder on the Highway: the Viola Luizzo story* (New York, Simon & Schuster).

SLEETER, C. (1994) White racism, *Multicultural Education*, 1(4), pp. 5–8, 39.

SLEETER, C. & GRANT, C. (1987) An analysis of multicultural education in the United States, *Harvard Educational Review*, 57, pp. 421–444.

STALVEY, L.M. (1989) *The Education of a WASP* (Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press).

TANNEN, D. (1990) *You Just Don't Understand Me: women and men in conversation* (New York, Morrow).

TATUM, B.D. (1992) Talking about race, learning about racism: the applications of racial identity development theory, *Harvard Educational Review*, 62, pp. 1–24.

TATUM, B.D. (1994) Teaching white students about racism: the search for white allies and the restoration of hope, *Teachers College Record*, 95, pp. 462–476.

TATUM, B.D. (1997) '*Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?' and Other Conversations about the Development of Racial Identity* (New York, Basic Books).

TATUM, B.D. & KNAPLUND, E.G. (1996) Outside the circle? The relational implications for white women working against racism, *Work in Progress, No. 78* (Wellesley, MA, The Stone Center Working Paper Series).

THOMPSON, B., & DISCH, E. (1992) Feminist, anti-racist, anti-oppression teaching: two white women's experience, *Radical Teacher*, 41, pp. 4–10.

THOMPSON, B. & TYAGI, S. (Eds) (1996) *Names We Call Home: autobiography on racial identity* (New York, Routledge.

VAN MANEN, M. (1990) *Researching Lived Experience: human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (Albany, NY, State University of New York Press).

WEBB, P.T. (2001) Reflection and reflective teaching: ways to improve pedagogy or ways to remain racist? *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 4, pp. 149–156.

WEBER, L. (2001) *Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality: a conceptual framework* (Boston, MA, McGraw Hill).

WEILER, K. (1988) *Women Teaching for Change: gender, class and power* (South Hadley, MA, Bergin & Garvey).