

“THINGS GET GLOSSED OVER”

REARTICULATING THE SILENCING POWER OF WHITENESS IN EDUCATION

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This article investigates the ways that White teachers approach issues of race, racism, and White supremacy in White-dominated educational settings. Drawing from data from a yearlong qualitative research study, the article uses discourse analysis, critical studies of Whiteness, and feminist theory to detail 15 rhetorical, behavioral, analytical, and interactional strategies that participants used to insulate themselves from implication in social inequality. The article demonstrates how participation in these strategies stymied attempts at transformative multicultural education and thus functioned to reproduce, rather than challenge, the status quo of educational and social inequality.

Keywords: Whiteness; discourse analysis; secondary education; race

I think it's almost easier to teach diversity issues [in a racially diverse school]. You just have to find different ways to work it in a predominantly White school . . . like some things just get glossed over. . . . There are comments people make, and you can choose to ignore them.

Phoebe

Phoebe,¹ a White² beginning teacher, argued from her experience observing and teaching at two schools with differing racial demographics that it was easier for a White teacher to talk about “diversity issues” in a racially diverse school than in a predominantly White school. Although she said that discussing these issues can be difficult for White teachers in a racially diverse school “because you might feel like you’re offending certain people,” she asserted that it was harder to “work [multicultural issues] in or just even address when [they] come up” in a predominantly White school.

In many ways, Phoebe’s analysis seems counterintuitive—why would it be easier for a White teacher to talk about issues of race in a predominantly African American class than it is in a classroom where she and all her students

are White? Given contemporary tensions about race, one might think that a White teacher would be more wary of discussing race in a racially diverse setting. Yet White teachers in White-dominated educational settings are indeed likely to “gloss over” issues of race, racism, and White supremacy. This article will explore ways of talking, interacting, and thinking that may contribute to this “glossing over” by White teachers and students. This research draws from critical studies of Whiteness, which shows that Whiteness privileges Whites and oppresses people of color in our classrooms as in our society, and it also explores how the interactional styles of White people in White-dominated educational settings impede movement toward progressive, anti-racist education.

STUDY OVERVIEW

This research study reports on data collected in White-dominated³ educational settings—an eighth-grade classroom and university student-teaching seminar—for more than a year. Shelby Malone was the student teacher in

the eighth-grade classroom, and she described herself as a liberal, White, middle-class teacher who was frustrated in her attempts to have her students critically engage with issues of race, racism, and White supremacy. Students in the eighth-grade classroom all identified themselves as White and lived in a small, affluent village near our midwestern state university town. Students in the university seminar, including Ms. Malone, all identified as White and ranged in their familiarity with discussions of racism and White supremacy, but all had self-selected into a student-teaching seminar that focused on multicultural issues and expressed a commitment to and interest in exploring the impact of race and racism on their teaching. They had spent a semester together in an English methods class prior to participation in the study. I, the study author, am a White woman and was the co-leader of this seminar; I included myself in the study in keeping with feminist and critical concerns about the relationship between the "observer" and the "observed" (cf. Behar, 1993; Lather & Smithies, 1997) and to address concerns of such scholars as Hurtado and Stewart (1997), who argued, "It is critical for scholars exploring the meaning of Whiteness to articulate the implications of their own relation to Whiteness" (p. 308).

This study explains how the worldview or cultural model of Whiteness was activated and brought to life in White-dominated educational contexts through a collection of ways of speaking, interacting, and thinking that I call "White educational discourse." "White educational discourse" is a constellation of ways of speaking, interacting, and thinking in which White teachers gloss over issues of race, racism, and White supremacy in ways that reinforce the status quo, even when they have a stated desire to do the opposite. Specifically, this study explored the following research questions:

1. How does Whiteness impact White-dominated educational settings?
2. What "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, [and] speaking" (Gee, 1996, p. viii) do White teachers and students employ in White-dominated educational settings with respect to issues of race, racism, and White supremacy?

Multicultural Education

Like Banks and Banks (2001), I believe that "all students—regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics—should have an equal opportunity to learn in school" (p. 3). Multicultural education is an attempt to make school a place where all students can benefit from "education as the practice of freedom" (hooks, 1997). But multicultural education must go beyond the "contributions approach," which focuses on inserting discrete ethnic "heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements" (Banks & Banks, 2001, p. 229) into the mainstream core curriculum because in this approach, students see ethnic issues and events as a sideline to "the main story."

Instead, I seek to move toward a "transformative" or "social action" approach to multicultural education. In transformative multicultural education [TME], the mainstream-centric perspective becomes only one of several presented. Various perspectives, frames, and content infuse students' understandings of the "nature, development, and complexity of U.S. society" (Banks & Banks, 2001, p. 234). Social-action multicultural education [SAME] builds on this foundation and goes further to equip and ignite students for social action and change.

CRITICAL STUDIES OF WHITENESS

The literature from critical studies of Whiteness suggests that Whiteness may be a barrier that prevents teachers from engaging in TME or SAME. Critical studies of Whiteness recognize, analyze, and critique the power and privileges associated with Whiteness. From this literature, I have culled three characteristics of Whiteness generally agreed on by scholars: that Whiteness is powerful yet power-evasive, that Whiteness uses a wide variety of techniques to maintain its power, and that Whiteness is not monolithic.

Characteristic 1: Whiteness Is Powerful Yet Power-Evasive

Scholars agree that Whiteness possesses and maintains real power, power that Whites may (often unconsciously) ignore, resist, or deny.

Indeed, David Roediger's (2002) review of this literature posits that "the central overarching theme . . . is the argument that White identity is decisively shaped by the exercise of power" (p. 23) and argues that Whiteness remains a system of advantages in political, social, legal, and cultural arenas (cf. Harris, 1993; hooks, 1997; Morrison, 1992; Roediger, 1999, 2002).

Interestingly, the primary way that Whites continue this power is by consciously or unconsciously ignoring or denying its existence (cf. Banning, 1999; Fine et al., 1997; Frankenberg, 1993). Winant (2001) nuanced this powerful/power-evasive dichotomy and argued that many Whites *do* consciously possess at least some sense of their own power and privilege because of "the partial but real successes" (p. 41) of the Civil Rights Movement. Chubbuck (2004) supported Winant's notion of a dualistic White identity by describing how White teachers may demonstrate both disruptions and enactments of Whiteness in their classroom practices.

Characteristic 2: Whiteness Employs Numerous Techniques to Maintain Its Power

A second major characteristic of Whiteness is that its power comes from (and begets) a diverse range of techniques that keep it at the center. Scholars document how maintaining certain perspectives, such as the myth that the United States is a meritocracy (Frankenberg, 1993; Powell, 1997) and "color-blindness" (Frankenberg, 2001; Morrison, 1992; Paley, 1979), insulate Whites. Others (Duesterberg, 1998; McIntyre, 1997; Pixley & VanDerPloeg, 2000; Sleeter, 1995) have traced how certain interactional and pedagogical strategies such as encouraging student voice, "creating a culture of niceness" (McIntyre, 1997, p. 46), avoiding critique (Gomez, Allen, & Clinton, 2004) and failing to interrogate one's own implication in racial domination also insulate Whites from implication in racial domination.

Characteristic 3: Whiteness is Not Monolithic

The literature on Whiteness also warns against oversimplifying or stereotyping Whiteness.

Perry's (2002) work with White youth in two high schools with racially different demographics suggests that the proximity of Whites to people of color greatly impacts how they form White identity, conceive of White culture, and possess or exercise power. In a predominantly White school, White students experienced themselves as normal, color-blind, and race-neutral, whereas in a multiracial school, White students were forced to struggle to more complexly define and understand racial identity and culture. Other scholars have explored how class, sexual orientation, and context (cf. Bérubé, 2001; Frankenberg, 1993; Hartigan, 2001) also nuance how Whiteness is embodied.

These scholars have described the reasons for and results of the privileging/oppression associated with Whiteness, but there is little evidence to demonstrate *how* discourses of Whiteness get enacted. This research seeks to fill that gap by showing how the interactional styles of White people in White-dominated educational settings may impede movement towards anti-racist orientations.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Gee (1999) has provided the following succinct, socially responsible rationale for a focus on discourse:

The fact that people have differential access to different identities and activities, connected to different sorts of status and social goods, is a root source of inequality in society. Intervening in such matters can be a contribution to social justice. Since different identities and activities are enacted in and through language, the study of language is integrally connected to matters of equity and justice. (p. 13, emphasis added)

Gee (1996) made an important distinction between *discourse* (with a lowercase "d"), which he defines as stretches of language-in-use, and *Discourse* (with an uppercase "D"), which he defines as "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles . . . by specific groups of people" (p. viii; emphasis in original). In Gee's view, our actions and ideologies—our very "ways of being in the world"—are socially constructed

by the Discourses to which we belong and in which we participate.

Gee's distinction between discourse and Discourse is important to this study. By focusing on participants' Discourse—their ways not just of speaking but also of "behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing"—I was able to construct a richer picture of how and why participants approached issues of race, racism, and White supremacy as they did. This is particularly valuable because teachers often feel frustrated when their attempts to present multicultural curricula and raise multicultural issues seem to persist at a "contributions" level even when teachers desire pushing themselves and their students further. This study shows that it is not only the material presented but also the ways in which it is talked about, interacted about, and thought about by all participants that impacts how it is ultimately taken up.

DATA COLLECTION

This study reports on data collected from a yearlong study of two sites: an eighth-grade language arts classroom and a university student-teaching seminar. Data collected in the eighth-grade class include 8 weeks of field notes, audio- and videotapes, twenty 90-minute interviews with Ms. Malone, copies of all teaching materials, and student work; 40 journal entries from Ms. Malone; and interviews with 12 eighth-graders. From the university seminar, data include audiotapes and field notes from 14 sessions and copies of all teaching materials and student work.

DATA ANALYSIS

Critical studies of Whiteness suggested that Whiteness could be seen as a pervasive and powerful worldview or "cultural model" that impacts how White people (and others) see the world. According to Gee (1999), cultural models are worldviews that play out through a collection of ways of talking, behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, and so forth, which Gee calls Discourses. In other words, cultural models "come to life" interactionally through Discourses. Seeing Whiteness

as a cultural model suggested that there would be associated White Discourses that would show themselves in speech, action, and so on.

I employed constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to create both open and axial codes throughout data collection, which shaped and informed my data collection. All data were coded, categorized, and analyzed with attention to how participants talked, interacted, behaved, thought, and valued in moments when issues of race, class, gender, and other multicultural categories were raised in the classroom and how the cultural model of Whiteness might be influencing those moments.

I wrote more than 75 theoretical memos (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) to make sense of my data and guide my interpretation, which helped me begin to draw connections among the codes. Ms. Malone and other participants read and responded to pieces of analysis in process. These analysis methods enabled me to make sense of my data, informed my data collection in situ, provided triangulation, and gave a rationale for selecting significant moments to analyze in more depth using discourse analysis.

I collapsed and grouped codes until I had a group of persistent and unique codes for how participants interacted in these White-dominated educational settings regarding multicultural issues. I focused in particular on issues of race, racism, and White supremacy, as these issues were the most prevalent in the data. As I reviewed the data and worked with these codes, I found that they each could be grouped under one of the characteristics of Whiteness summarized above. That is, each code represented a moment that was powerful yet power-evasive (Whiteness Characteristic 1) and that demonstrated a strategy for White power-maintenance (Whiteness Characteristic 2). The variety of codes and ways of talking, interacting, and thinking that I found that fit into these first two categories highlighted that Whiteness is not monolithic (Whiteness Characteristic 3). Together, these codes demonstrated the significant impact of Whiteness surrounding issues of race, racism, and White supremacy in White-dominated educational settings.

WHITE EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE

Convinced that I was observing and participating in a Discourse that showed how the cultural model of Whiteness was brought to life regarding issues of race, racism, and White supremacy in White-dominated educational settings, I devised the term "White educational discourse" (WED) to describe it. WED is a "way of being in the [educational] world" shown through "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing" (Gee, 1996, p. viii) about race, racism, and White supremacy that is pervasive, powerful yet power-evasive, and yet nonmonolithic. I chose this particular phrase carefully. I use *White* to indicate that this "way of being in the world" is linked to critical studies of Whiteness and to being (or being influenced by) a powerful White person. I use the term *educational* to highlight my focus on educational settings and not a more general field. I call this a *Discourse*, using Gee's capitalization to bring out the variety of ways that Whiteness impacts White-dominated educational settings; it stresses that Whiteness plays out not just as "White talk" (McIntyre, 1997) but also as "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing" (Gee, 1996, p. viii). I found that these classroom practices about race, racism, and White supremacy in White-dominated educational settings worked together to undermine teachers' stated desires to engage students in TME/SAME and deflected possibilities for educational and social change.

I do not mean to imply that any of these classroom practices, by itself, necessarily undermines such critical engagement. Rather, it is a *constellation* of these practices in White-dominated educational settings that may constitute the WED that can insulate participants from implication in social inequality, value social cohesion over challenge, and promote a noncritical stance to race, racism, and White supremacy. The next section will use examples to illustrate the ways of speaking, interacting, and behaving that characterize WED.

WED ILLUSTRATED

Characteristic of Whiteness 1: Whiteness Is Powerful Yet Power-Evasive

Participants in WED speak, behave, interact, and think in ways that are powerful yet power-evasive. As critical studies of Whiteness suggest, White people dominate many arenas of life but frequently ignore or resist that power. To cite just a few of the many studies that demonstrate this domination, Morrison (1992) argued that some of literature's most taken-for-granted metaphors are riddled with White supremacy; Harris (1993) demonstrated how Whiteness itself possesses a value that the legal system has recognized; and Lipsitz (1998) detailed how Whites have benefited from public policies on education, housing, politics, and work that serve and maintain White interests. Similarly, in my study, White teachers and students spoke, behaved, interacted, and thought about race, racism, and White supremacy in ways that were powerful yet power-evasive. There were several ways that we accomplished this power-evasion, including the following:

- Avoiding words
- False starts
- Safe self-critique
- Asserting ignorance or uncertainty
- Letting others off the hook
- Citing authority
- Silence
- Changing the topic

Each of these Discourse moves enabled us to shift focus away from the fact that our Whiteness gave us unearned power and dominance. By carefully avoiding acknowledgement of the power that Whiteness conferred on us and instead positioning ourselves as less than powerful, we avoided seeing ourselves as powerful agents with an obligation to disown our unearned privileges and fight to reform the institutions that conferred such privileges on us.

Avoiding Words

Study participants often went to extreme rhetorical lengths to avoid saying words that

they believed might offend others. Avoiding particular words was a way to acknowledge the power of a particular word, but it was also used to mark one's self as a "good" White in contrast to "bad" Whites who would use such words. For example, during the university seminar, Emma had a very difficult time discussing racial profiling in a store where she had worked for years.

The majority of our robberies that we actually catch the people are African Americans. And so like when people come in the store—and I mean, I don't—I guess you could say—I don't know—we're rac—I mean, our store is, I don't want to say, you know, "Our store is racist." But I mean, if an African American walks in who looks sketchy, you know, we'll be much more apt to follow them around the store than a, you know, if a White-trash looking person came in. But I mean, it's true, and—but I mean, statistically.

This speech is striking for the rhetorical false starts, hesitations, and discomfort with saying the words, "We are racist." Emma saw herself as successfully teaching against social injustice, and it appeared to be difficult for her to reconcile her vision of herself as one of the "good Whites" with the racism (via racial profiling) that she recognized, presumably practiced, and seemed to endorse at her store.

False Starts

Study participants made numerous false starts as we spoke about issues of race, racism, and White supremacy, notably more often than when we were speaking about other topics. These "instant editings" of speech often tempered what might potentially have been a challenge to other group members. These false starts furthered social cohesion, buried challenges, and protected both the speaker and other group members from critique.

For example, in a student-teaching seminar discussion about confronting our own racism as White teachers, I said,

But I think when we say, like—I think I've heard us—I wonder if I've heard us say, "Well, I've got all White students, so we don't have all these race issues necessarily to deal with.

What I tried to assert here was that despite what the students had repeatedly said—that

race was not an issue in their all-White classes—racism was indeed present, and they and their students were implicated in it. However, my first sentence rhetorically mediated this challenge. Starting the sentence 3 times, I became more removed from direct confrontation of the students; instead of asserting that we habitually say race isn't an issue as I began, I end up saying, "I wonder if I've heard us say" that race isn't an issue. In the end, I watered down my challenge of class participants' statements and attitudes about how race impacts classroom interactions and ended up colluding as a power-evading White person to hide how White attitudes about race *do* negatively impact classroom interactions.

Safe Self-Critique

Even when participants engaged in direct reflection on their own implication in racial inequality, a practice that could ostensibly disrupt WED, they (we) found ways to lessen this implication. In university seminar, Charlie, the White co-leader of the seminar, and I wanted our students to shift their focus from considering the barriers to multicultural education that they kept raising to how their White racial identity impacted their lives and their teaching. We deliberately modeled critical self-reflection, yet when we told stories about our own practices, we told stories located safely in the past. When we read Peggy McIntosh's (1988) work on White privilege, Charlie responded,

I guess the one that struck me again is the very last one about the flesh colored Band-Aids, because that was one I had thought before. But it's something I had thought embarrassingly late in my life, I came to that realization. What for me felt—I can remember when that first struck me and how, um, how I realized I had gotten this far and never really thought about it. And then seeing it again on here, it brought back that moment.

Although Charlie did critique himself in this turn of talk, he also located himself as realizing the errors of his past ways, rather than giving an example from his current practice as we wanted our students to do. This practice enabled us to present ourselves as "good Whites" in ways that deflected attention away

from how our current practices continued White domination in the classroom.

Changing Topic

Participants in WED often shifted the focus of discussions about race, racism, and White supremacy in ways that insulated themselves from implication in social and educational inequality. For a presentation, eighth-graders Katelyn and Sarah chose racism as their topic and were instructed to research current examples of racism and suggest ways that students like them could fight racism. Though they had read articles on horrific examples of contemporary racism, such as the burning of African American churches and the dragging death of James Byrd, Jr., much of their presentation focused on the wrongs of making "blonde jokes" and "imitating people's accents," in which blonde, British Sarah cast herself as a victim. This changing of the topic from racism to other, arguably lesser kinds of "discrimination" distanced both the speakers and the class from confronting contemporary instances of racism in our culture and personal lives.

Asserting Ignorance or Uncertainty

Asserting ignorance or uncertainty enabled speakers to avoid taking responsibility for particular viewpoints by implying that they were not fully qualified to make their assertions. Phrases like "I don't know" occurred frequently in discussions about multicultural issues, most often when the speaker was offering an opinion. For example, when discussing a racist student-newspaper opinion column, Phoebe offered,

I've heard kids express these type of opinions before. And like Emma said, it is just an opinion, and it doesn't seem to be that—I don't know. Maybe I'm wrong and maybe I'm reading it in the wrong tone . . . I don't know.

Phoebe's repetition of phrases indicating uncertainty functioned to mediate how "responsible" she was for the opinion offered, thus heading off potential criticism of her opinion and enabling her to avoid responsibility for a potentially inflammatory statement.

Letting Off the Hook

Frequently after even a minor disagreement, group members found ways to let a classmate

off the hook and diffuse the confrontation. They did so by offering a possible rationale for the confronted person's views or actions or by including themselves or the entire group in the critique. When critiquing a particular perspective, members also pointed out the good and worthy points and possible rationales for the position that they critiqued. This strategy served to water down challenging or provocative points that a speaker had been trying to make.

For example, during a seminar discussion, I referenced the use of the problematic and offensive term "White trash" in a previous seminar to challenge myself for not having addressed it at the time and to challenge the group for having used it. Phoebe had been the first to use the term, which several members of the group continued. Even though I was aware of this fact when I spoke, I let Phoebe personally off the hook for this problematic practice by using an indefinite structure and passive voice.

Author: When we were talking a long time ago about the White privilege text, do you guys remember that? Because we were all using [the term "White trash"]—it was being used in this shorthand way to represent, to talk about class differences, and uh, . . . I remember at the time noting it, and raising my eyebrows at it a little, but not doing anything about it or stopping us to talk about it. So . . .

Phoebe: I didn't just mean class differences.

Author: No, I—you're not—it was used. I mean, it wasn't, I mean, it was used.

By letting others off the hook, participants implied that the person they were letting off the hook was not one of the "bad Whites" responsible for inequity and thus distanced themselves and their peers from implication in societal injustice.

Citing Authority

Speakers, especially at the university level, often cited authorities, such as authors or cooperating teachers, during discussions of multicultural issues to back up their points. This way of speaking about multicultural issues helped to further a powerful/power-evasive dynamic that continued White dominance while denying White power. Citing authority gave credence or weight to a perspective while also stressing that it was not one's original idea, enabling one to

evade power and personal responsibility for having come to this conclusion. For example, Charlie used a reference to a presentation he'd seen at the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English to challenge Shelby's interpretation of violent writing from a student that she was reading as gendered.

It was at NCTE, I saw a presentation on reading young male writing. . . . Well, a lot of times it's a young male's way to challenge authority, to, you know, sort of identify themselves . . . against accepted norms . . . there's always a kind of a sense of playfulness; oftentimes, people read a sense of playfulness to it and a sense of sort of critique.

Charlie highlighted that he was citing authority, not just giving *his* opinion as he changes from the assertion, "There's always a kind of sense of playfulness" to the more general "oftentimes people read a sense of playfulness to it." Charlie thus set himself as less personally challenging of Shelby, although he also added weight to his statement as both knowledgeable of the field under discussion and as shared by particular NCTE presenters and "people" in general. This powerful yet power-evasive stance added weight to his perspective and evaded his own personal implication in challenging Shelby.

Silence

One of the outcomes of silence in discussions of race, racism, and White supremacy can be a lack of challenges to dominant perspectives. This lack of challenge, in turn, can reinforce the status quo that Whites enforce and from which they benefit. Numerous physical, emotional, psychological, and interactional factors all influence participation in group discussions, but paying attention to behaviors that "speak" during silence is an important way to recognize what silence may mean. For example, during a discussion in university seminar about White privilege, Katherine began participating but soon became silent. During her silence, her lowered head, frown, lack of eye contact, and arms crossed on her chest indicated that she was opposed to the dominant strain of the discussion. Indeed, in a conversation with her after class, she indicated that she felt that we weren't being "realistic" about White privilege and how it impacted education. Her behavior indicated that her

silence represented a challenge to WED rather than a lack of engagement, but rather than take up this challenge to our Discourse and consider what it implied about group engagement with the issues we were discussing, I dismissed her as uncooperative for not participating.

Characteristic of Whiteness 2: Whiteness Employs Numerous Techniques to Maintain Its Power

And participants in WED speak, behave, interact, and think in numerous ways that maintain the power of Whiteness with respect to racism and White supremacy. Critical studies of Whiteness have detailed myriad techniques employed to maintain rather than disrupt the power of Whiteness. In this study, participants were similarly resourceful. Participants used a variety of ways of speaking, behaving, interacting, and thinking to maintain their power, including the following:

- Affirming sameness
- Joking
- Agreeing and supporting
- Praising and encouraging
- Teacher and student caring
- Socializing and sharing personal information
- Focusing on barriers to multicultural education

Several of the discourse moves that participants used to maintain this power focused on creating classroom feelings of closeness, comfort, safety, encouragement, and sameness. Valuing student-centered pedagogy, participants actively and often consciously worked toward such an environment. Such a focus can encourage students to feel positive about what and with whom they are learning, to look forward to coming to class, and to feel supported in their efforts. But it can also muffle critique and challenge conflict that can lead to change. Pratt (2002), for example, saw the classroom as a "contact zone" (rather than, say, a comfort zone) where "cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (p. 4). The examples below show how an overemphasis on making students feel comfortable can prevent movement toward transformative or social-action multicultural engagement.

Affirming Sameness

Participants often affirmed the sameness of the members of the group, focusing on similarities instead of differences. For example, participants often couched "confessions" about their role in racism and White supremacy as ones that "we've all had." Thus, they not only partially exonerated the speaker/confessor but also bound the group together in collective responsibility. In the university seminar, we self-consciously reflected on similarities of the group, such as referring to the fact that "we are all a bunch of White people sitting around here" discussing racism and White supremacy. This affirmation of sameness may have helped participants feel comfortable sharing opinions, but it also set up an unconscious "us-them" mentality in such a "safe" and homogeneous group where participants did not challenge each other.

Joking

Making jokes and laughing enabled participants to establish or affirm unity and sameness because jokes often referenced previous conversations from the group and emphasized that the group had something in common. Laughter often signaled that the speaker was mocking herself, enabling her to create distance and head off critique. The behavior of laughing also interrupted the flow of difficult discussions, diffusing tension, and preventing questions or challenges from being taken up. For example, when discussing an article about White privilege, Josh and Phoebe made a joke out of marketing norming that labels plastic bandages generically "flesh" color, when the peachy color shows that the marketing department is only thinking of White people. This joking followed Charlie's raising the idea that he had relatively recently noticed how plastic bandages' "flesh" color was exclusionary.

Josh: I mean, how would you market that? [laughs]
And not sound like, you know—you'd have to have a really good marketing agent put that colors other than peach for Band-Aids on the market and not sound bad.

Phoebe: You could say, "Now for everyone!"

Josh: [laughs]

Phoebe: That's easy! [laughter from several classmates]

Instead of continuing Charlie's self-critique to talk about White privileges that they realized they were exercising, they joked. This joking interrupted their own and other participants' recognitions of White privileges as well as colluding to prevent them from extending the critique to their own practices.

Agreeing and Supporting

By agreeing with and supporting other members of the group, participants "helped" others who were presenting opinions that could have been interrogated for their implication in White domination. This practice made everyone feel comfortable instead of challenged. Feeling comfortable did not lead to change or exploration but instead supported the status quo in which Whites dominate. For example, in Ms. Malone's class, when Rich gave a confused example of prejudice as being "the liberation of the Jews," Ms. Malone and an unidentifiable classmate "helped" Rich to make sure that there is no confusion that he was in any way prejudiced himself.

Ms. Malone: Can anyone give an example of a time in history when someone has been punished for having different beliefs?

Rich: In relation to Anne Frank, the liberation of the Jews.

Ms. Malone: The liberation? Or when they put someone into concentration camps and take away their freedom?

Rich: Yeah, that's what I meant.

Ms. Malone: I knew what you were saying, I just—

Rich: I'm not—

Classmate: You're not that way!

As Ms. Malone says her words, the video shows her moving closer to Rich, angling her head toward him, and nodding as he talked, all actions that reinforce her support of him. Ms. Malone said that her intent here was to help Rich with his word choice because she suspected he simply misspoke. The classmate also seemed to want to make sure that Rich didn't publicly say anything that could be construed as anti-Semitic, perhaps especially as this was one of the first days that I, a stranger observing their well-liked teacher, was in the classroom. Rich's classmate seemed to try to shut down

any possibility of such consideration, marking it as impossible to say even accidentally.

Praising and Encouraging

Group members, particularly those in teacher roles, did a lot of praising participants. Certainly praise and encouragement belong in every classroom! However, praise and encouragement often overshadowed challenge and questioning and thus stifled critique of the status quo.

For example, in the university seminar, I shared a story about how I had handled the O. J. Simpson verdict as a high school teacher, a story (told safely in the past) that I meant to be a negative example of how my White assumptions and discomfort silenced my students of color. However, Daisy took up the story not as an opportunity for me and others to reflect on how we continued social inequity as teachers but as a marker of my honesty and courage in sharing this story—and by extension, how far society has come.

Author: But when they announced that verdict and some of my kids started to cheer, and they were so excited, I really had a really bad reaction. I mean, I was just like, "Okay, you know, we're getting quiet. Let's you know—we're having a vocabulary test." . . . But you know, I mean, I just want you to know that like I didn't handle it well because of who I was and because of the shock that I was dealing with. And I didn't do anything with it the next day either.

Daisy: I think it's okay . . . to recognize out loud to your to your class that we have a shameful past about our race relations, we still struggle with race relations, and that the fact that people even take the time to discuss these things are courageous. Um, because they're huge and they're emotional. And everybody's so invested in it, it's a huge issue . . . the fact that we can even do that now at this point in our history is pretty amazing.

I didn't challenge Daisy's interpretation or return the students to my point, and the conversation changed to sharing success stories. Praising and encouraging of every turn of student talk presented a perspective that every conversational entry was valuable and equal. This suggested that students had no need to push themselves beyond their initial reactions to a topic or critique their own implication in racism and White supremacy.

Socializing and Sharing Personal Information

Because social cohesion was important to participants in WED, we frequently chatted about social and personal lives and shared other personal information before, during, and after "academic" conversations. Along with informal discussions of teaching, participants in the university seminar included each other on e-mail lists about social issues, attended a classmate's wedding together, acknowledged birthdays, and discussed dating and social events. Ms. Malone and I also spent part of each interview chatting about my baby son, her boyfriend, her job prospects, and our weekend and holiday plans. I cannot imagine being in a classroom or research relationship in which I am "all business," but in constellation with other strategies of WED, socializing and sharing personal information added to what McIntyre (1997, p. 121) called a "culture of niceness," in which Whites care more about being nice than about challenging or critiquing each other. Although this social and personal connection provided a pleasant seminar environment, these relationships also added to a social discomfort with critique, encouraging letting each other off the hook and other strategies described above.

Teacher and Student Caring

Teachers stressed that they cared about their students as people and wanted them to feel supported. Similarly, teachers valued student "buy in" or overt displays of caring about them, course topics, activities, and assignments. By demonstrating caring about their students and rewarding investment in classroom work, teachers encouraged students to support, rather than to challenge, their perspectives and protected everyone from feeling uncomfortably implicated in racism and White supremacy. Students seemed to understand that it was important for them to show that they cared about and bought into classroom activities. When they disagreed, their behavior often showed that doing so was difficult. For example, I noted the following in elaborated field notes from a university seminar in which we were discussing an assignment in which

student teachers were to develop a lesson plan around Toni Cade Bambara's short story "The Lesson":

Shelby began by asking if she could say something about the assignment. She noted that was inappropriate because of its profanity and content; that her cooperating teacher had said her job would be in jeopardy if she taught it; that it was beyond the level of her students; that her student couldn't begin to relate to looking at the effects of systematic oppression; that they would focus on the foul language; and she felt she thus couldn't do it. She was frustrated with the assignment. It is uncharacteristic for Shelby to start class discussions and to be so forceful and direct in her language, and it is uncharacteristic of her and anyone to begin by criticizing the assignment. As she read, she was clearly uncomfortable, with flushed cheeks, lack of eye contact, and a quivering voice.

So although she did express her disagreement with us, a move that challenged the WED that dominated our seminar, her physical discomfort with doing so showed that an emphasis on caring and comfort made it difficult for her to challenge and disagree.

Focusing on Barriers to Multicultural Education/Social Change

Participants in WED positioned social and educational change as difficult, beyond the influence of individual action, and generally unlikely. We oriented conversations, even those that tried to focus on positive perspectives, around the barriers that we faced in trying to enact TME/SAME using a variety of rhetorical and interactional strategies. Student teachers often indicted "bad Whites," including students, administrators, cooperating teachers, colleagues, and parents, as undermining their efforts or intentions toward TME/SAME with respect to racism and White supremacy. For example, Josh noted that he wouldn't be able to present an article on White privilege in his all-White school because "the district is so homogeneous that . . . if I tried to teach this, my [cooperating teacher] would probably protest and then I'd get major flack." There was implicit self-praise rather than self-challenge in this perspective because he positioned himself implicitly as a "good White" fighting the good fight against dominant "bad Whites" like his cooperating teacher.

A CLASSROOM EXAMPLE

These illustrations of various aspects of WED have demonstrated what I mean by each term, but it is the *constellation* of a variety of these practices that constitutes WED rather than any single aspect in isolation. Discussion of a classroom moment will help illustrate how they work a constellation that undermines efforts toward multicultural engagement. I will show how an apparently benign and ordinary classroom discussion of racial prejudice in Shelby's White-dominated eighth-grade classroom typified a White way of talking, interacting, and thinking that obfuscates the power of Whiteness, derails attempts at TME/SAME, and reproduces rather than challenges the status quo of educational and social inequality.

Discussion of The Diary of Anne Frank—Day 2

Ms. Malone: What do you think it would take for our society to be free of prejudice?

Sarah: No one to have an opinion.

Ms. Malone: No one to have an opinion? Okay. Why is that?

Sarah: Because people look at things in different ways, and they think about things in different ways, and I mean, if you have an opinion, then you're going to think differently.

Ms. Malone: Well, so do you think prejudice is having different opinions about things?

Sarah: Well, not always, but in some ways, it is.

Ms. Malone: Okay. Okay, Robert?

Robert: I think it would almost take a society as in *The Giver*, like, where everyone is brainwashed, and you don't really have your own opinions. Like you don't even think for yourself really. And you just kind of do—are—what you're told to be, kind of like, and do everything you're told to do and stuff, and you don't even have—like Sarah said, kind of an opinion about that stuff.

Ms. Malone: So what I'm hearing from you, and kind of from Sarah, is that the only way for us not to have any sort of prejudice is for everyone to be the same. Is that what you're saying? Do you think that that's the only way we can be rid of prejudice, is not to have anyone who's different from another person? I'm just trying to clarify. I just want to make sure I understand what you're saying.

Robert: I'm not sure, I guess—

Ms. Malone: Okay! That's kind of what you meant? Okay. Nick?

Discussion of Classroom Example

Ms. Malone's goal with her unit on social justice was to "open students' eyes to social injustice" and ignite them for social activism. So when Sarah, a White eighth-grader, equated "having an opinion" with prejudice, Ms. Malone acted to gently challenge this by asking, "Well, so, do you think prejudice is having different opinions about things?" After Ms. Malone's challenge, Sarah reframed her opinion to allow some uncertainty: "Well, not always." This protected her from potential criticism or challenge and enabled her to avoid taking responsibility for what she said. Sarah thus acted rhetorically to push her point that prejudice is rightfully having different opinions about things—a statement that supported the status quo because it positioned prejudice as a positive state of affairs—while also sheltering herself from potential critique by partially backing down from this idea as she expressed uncertainty.

Robert, another White student, supported Sarah's view by invoking the popular book *The Giver* as an example of the negative impact of a society without prejudice, in which "you don't really have your opinions, you don't even think for yourself really." As discussed above, by citing a popular authority, Robert bolstered his point and made it more difficult to argue with. At the same time, citing authority distanced Robert from responsibility for the point as he seemed merely the messenger for Lowry's point. This powerful yet power-evasive stance added weight to a perspective on prejudice that supported the status quo while evading Robert's personal implication in such a potentially controversial view. Similarly, by linking his view to "what Sarah said," he affirmed their sameness and bolstered their now jointly held and supported-by-Lowry opinion.

Ms. Malone then subtly challenged this perspective by restating Robert and Sarah's views and asking for confirmation: "Is that what you're saying? Do you think that that's the only way we can be rid of prejudice, is not to have anyone who's different from another person?" But then Ms. Malone let Robert off the hook as she softened her rhetorical challenge: "I'm just trying to clarify. I just want to

make sure I understand what you're saying." Despite this softening, Robert appeared to interpret her words as a challenge. Like Sarah, he backed down from his assertion ("I'm not sure, I guess—"), expressing uncertainty that Ms. Malone interrupted before calling on another student ("Okay! That's kind of what you meant? Okay, Nick."). This brief commentary by Ms. Malone acted to let Robert and his classmates know that his participation was valued even if he was uncertain about his points or had said something that wasn't quite "right." Ms. Malone wanted to make sure that her students felt comfortable expressing their views, as she emphasized encouragement, caring, and support over challenge, possible student discomfort, and potential conflict.

Thus, in discussing prejudice, Ms. Malone and her students made a variety of interactional moves that add further meaning to their actual words and undermine Malone's attempts to push toward more critical perspectives; these moves include affirming sameness, asserting uncertainty, letting off the hook, citing authority, agreeing and supporting, and emphasizing a noncritical approach to multicultural issues. These ways of talking, behaving, and thinking worked together to bring to life and reify the oppressive power of Whiteness in this White-dominated educational setting.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

As discussed above, WED is a collection of ways of speaking, behaving, interacting, and thinking that together impacts how White teachers and students interact in White-dominated educational settings about race, racism, and White supremacy. Attention to WED can help progressive White teachers and teacher educators understand that our participation in WED may be a barrier to White teachers and teacher educators moving toward TME/SAME. Simply recognizing the pernicious ways that White Discourses often function in White-dominated educational settings is important; seeing the interactional consequences of WED can raise awareness of an undertheorized potential barrier to sustained and transformative White engagement with anti-racist pedagogies.

However, recognition is only a first step; the very "ordinary-ness" of WED to White teachers and students may make it seem impossible to overcome without complete rejection of familiar ways of being in the world. And because WED may impact White teacher educators as well as beginning teachers and their secondary students, we have as much work to do as they do. The recognition that the very ways that we talk, think, behave, and interact with other Whites can impede our attempts to move toward TME/SAME is daunting to the point of being potentially paralyzing or destructive. Trainor (2002) cautioned against insisting that Whites reject their familiar ways of being in the world and argued that by "creating rhetorical frames that demonize Whiteness and White students, we may do more harm than good, may inadvertently perpetuate, even create, the very values we seek to unravel in our teaching" (p. 647). Trainor's work resonates with my own teaching experience that presenting multicultural issues in ways that make people feel only guilt and discomfort, without presenting them with viable options for how to act on these new understandings, is irresponsible and ineffective.

Winant (2001) convincingly advocated deconstructing and "rearticulating" Whiteness: "rethinking and changing ideas about White identity and reorienting the practices consequent upon these ideas" (p. 107), using strategies of "the race traitor school" (cf. Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996; Roediger, 1999) without denying one's White identity. My work in White-dominated educational settings suggests that there are possibilities for a rearticulated WED, one that can self-consciously harness the strategies of WED in ways that promote a "transformative" or "social action" multiculturalism. That is, we can take up some of the comfortable and familiar practices of WED and consciously adapt them to push ourselves and our students out of our discursive comfort zones to accept our complicity in racism and White supremacy and enact anti-racist pedagogies.

A classroom example suggests moments that White teacher educators could build on to move toward and scaffold this rearticulated WED. In a university seminar on White privilege, Emma

told a story related to her by her cooperating teacher in a private conversation about "teacher safety" about an African American boy who was placed in her White-dominated seventh-grade classroom.

He kept harassing all the girls and . . . just kept getting worse and worse. And she was nervous. You know, it's these little tiny, you know, innocent little seventh-grade girls . . . and something happened where he stood up to hit [the cooperating teacher] and she got him suspended and kicked out of school.

The class discussion proceeded after a few questions and alarmed responses. At the time, Charlie and I did not challenge Emma about the larger contexts in which African American boys (like African American men in larger society) receive disproportionate disciplinary actions, the consequences of experienced White teachers sharing such stories with beginning White teachers, or the larger narrative about the "innocence" of White women being threatened by African American males that is invoked by this story. Interestingly, as the discussion progressed, Emma laughingly described the irony of asking her students for permission slips to see a PG movie when "these girls are dating 20-year-olds!" Amid a flurry of exclamations by classmates about the impropriety of middle-school students dating 20-year-olds, Charlie interjected, "Why can't they negotiate the ninth-grade kid in the classroom if they're dating 20-year-olds?" Here, Phoebe led us away from this topic, changing the subject to our original discussion question. Charlie did not pursue our challenge of Emma nor did any of the other students. But Charlie's direct question/challenge of Emma here did stand out from many of our other interactions with students that praised and encouraged, supported and affirmed, asked for further information, changed the subject, or remained silent.

Better still, we could have built on them here by asking our students to respond to Emma's story, saying something like, "Thanks so much for bringing this story to us, Emma! We all seem to have a lot to think about here. There seem to be some conflicting descriptions of White students here and some assumptions about African American students. Let's unpack

the story that Emma has told us and see what it might tell us about our own assumptions, fears, stereotypes, and questions." We could thus praise and encourage and position Emma as supporting our community by raising such a provocative topic. By using words like "let's" and "our," we would use the familiar strategy of affirming our sameness, and by inviting everyone to reflect on what issues it raises, we could let her off the hook. This sort of response would thus harness some of the strategies of WED but use them toward ends that might have led to a more critical discussion of our own implication in White racism.

It might seem exhausting to consider making changes to the very ways that we White teachers and teacher educators think, talk, and interact with our students. And what I am suggesting does imply a frequent meta-processing for White people interacting in White-dominated educational settings. It may feel daunting, tiring, pedantic, or self-absorbed to consider such hypersensitivity and self-consciousness. Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, and Quinlan (2001, p. 330) suggested that this process requires "a degree of scrutiny, honesty, and accountability rare in the teaching profession" and that both "support and accountability" are necessary for changes to take place, so the challenges of this approach are great. But haven't we long recognized the kind of "double vision" (DuBois, 1903/1997) and code switching required of people of color in America? By considering the impact of our comfortable and familiar ways of speaking and interacting with other Whites, and making even small changes to this Discourse as suggested above, we can begin a rearticulation of White identity that would further rather than hinder attempts to move toward TME/SAME.

NOTES

1. All names are pseudonyms.

2. I will use the terms "White," "African American," and "people of color" throughout this text because they are the terms used by the participants in the study and in the literature on Whiteness most often. However, I do find them problematic. "People of color" continues to make Whiteness invisible or "not a color." But insisting that "White is a color" could align me with a reactionary stance that speaks from a racist backlash rhetoric that can become "Whites are victims, too."

3. It is important to note here that safe self-reflection can be valuable for participants interacting around multicultural issues. Although an ultimate goal of multicultural education may be to recognize and actively struggle against one's own current participation in social injustice, coming to such realization and action is an ongoing, recursive, and never-ending process. Safe self-reflection, such as reflecting on one's past (which doesn't always feel safe to students anyway), is part of the process of moving toward "transformation" and "social action" multicultural education. My point is that excessive reliance on feeling safe and focusing on the self, together with the other Discourse strategies presented here, can insulate Whites from considering our implication in racism and White supremacy.

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