



The Perils and Strains of Teaching Race and Racism to Predominantly White Teacher Candidates

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ABSTRACT *This paper examines the overt and covert racism Black professors experience within the context of mainstream university teacher education programs. Informed by literature from Canadian sources and the authors' personal experiences, the paper challenges the perception that Canadian postsecondary teacher education is amenable to honest, open discussion and debates regarding racism. The common view of Canada as an inclusive and welcoming society needs re-examining given the degree of resistance that is encountered by racialized professors while teaching contentious topics, including racism and antiracism. A call is made for teacher education programs to revamp their curricula and to embed critical race and antiracist literature in all courses, in addition to recruiting, mentoring and retaining Black professors, senior administrators, staff and students.*

KEYWORDS race and racism; critical race perspectives; teacher candidates; teacher education; teaching practice

Introduction

Teaching about race and racism implicates everyone, particularly White Canadians. It disrupts the taken-for-granted and superficial reading of diversity that sustains oppression. Discussions of race and racism often trigger emotions, resistance and passionate denials on the part of White students whose knowledge of Canada's history is drawn largely from popular narratives that present the country as welcoming and peaceful (Gulliver,

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2018), and free of prejudice, while negating much of the brutality upon which Canada was built.

Informed by a critical autoethnographic approach, this paper uses Critical Race Theory as a framework to explain the overt and covert racism that Black professors in Canada experience within teacher education classrooms. Using critical autoethnographies and Critical Race Theory (CRT), we focus on our experiences as Black faculty in teacher education programs. Critical autoethnographies and CRT give us a space to tell our story in a manner that reflects our experiences, and perhaps those of other faculty members of colour. Critical autoethnography and CRT also allow us to tackle anti-Black racism and the institutional silences that undermine meaningful reform. We recognize the distinct struggles of racism, marginalization and barriers experienced by Indigenous people as well as racism experienced by other racialized faculty members in these institutions (Battiste, 2013; Henry et al., 2012; Little Bear, 2009), but in this paper we focus on our experiences as Black scholars. We draw mostly on existing Canadian literature and from our experiences working in two institutions located in Western and Central Canada, where we have been teaching since 2012 and 2014 respectively, to challenge the perception that postsecondary teacher education classrooms provide milieus wherein open and honest conversations about racism, and anti-Black racism, may be conducted (hooks, 2003; Sensoy & DiAngelo 2017b). We argue that dismantling systemic anti-Black racism requires tangible actions to galvanize institutions into recruiting, mentoring and retaining Black professors, administrators, and students, as well as expanding curricula to include courses on Black experiences in Canada and globally. Black people's knowledges have long been entombed in library archives, or when unearthed often dismissed by non-Black faculty and students as narratives aimed at bringing into disrepute the official view of Canada as a cultural mosaic – a place that is all-inclusive.

Being Black in Canadian Academe

A growing body of literature on the experiences of racialized faculty has emerged within Canadian academe. The bulk of this literature has focused on equity issues, particularly in the following areas: lack of opportunity for tenure track, tenured and leadership positions (Gosine, 2007; Henry, 2015; Henry et al., 2012; Henry & Tator, 2012; Henry et al., 2017; James, 2012; Wijesingha & Ramos, 2017); racialization of contract and contingent work (CAUT, 2018); the everyday racist experiences of Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) faculty (Mohamed & Beagan, 2019); overburdening BIPOC faculty with equity and diversity initiatives (Henry, 2015; Henry & Tator, 2012); practices that impede hiring of BIPOC faculty and staff (Henry, 2015; Henry et al., 2017; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017b);

inequitable power relations (Spafford et al., 2006); institutional whiteness, patriarchy and gendered racism (Henry, 2015); and leadership experiences of Black people (Henry, 2019).

Being Black and on a tenure track, or tenured, or in a leadership, staff or management position, is often assumed to be the product of employment equity initiatives (Lopez, 2020). Rarely is our presence seriously attributed to excellence, or our absence attributed to systemic discrimination. Black scholars are often thought of as intellectually inferior to their White peers. This springs from pervasive anti-Black racism, which Benjamin (2003) defines as institutionalized and deeply rooted in colonialism and chattel slavery. It finds expression in stereotypical perceptions about Black people, and in everyday racial aggressions and micro-aggressions (Dei, 2018; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021).

In academia, anti-Black racism manifests in the absence of courses that speak to the experiences of Black people (Dei, 2018); casting doubt on Black people's abilities (Daniel, 2019; Samuel & Wane, 2005); questioning or restricting opportunities and their right to hold academic positions (Dei, 2020); denying them employment, promotion or leadership opportunities or, if hired, being streamed into precarious sessional and contract positions (CAUT, 2018; Henry, 2015; Henry et al., 2017); passively or aggressively silencing them during meetings, ignoring their suggestions or contributions only to have a White peer acknowledged after stealing their thunder; recruiting the minimum number of Black students for prestigious programs or, if recruited, denying them scholarships and mentorships required to succeed (Henry, 2015; Henry et al., 2017); normalizing the use of the 'N-word' on the grounds it is essential to teaching history (Dei, 2018); and considering race scholarship as less rigorous or less credible, especially when conducted by Black professors vis-à-vis their White counterparts (Daniel, 2019; Dei, 2018; Samuel & Wane, 2005).

In the field of teacher education in Canada, a considerable body of work has focused on diversity within teacher education (Egbo, 2011); teacher candidates' understandings of diversity, racism and whiteness (Levine-Rasky, 1998; Solomon, et al., 2005); experiences of racialized teacher candidates in teacher education programs (Chinnery, 2008); and examining the power of race as a social construct (St. Denis & Schick, 2003; Wane, 2003) among other foci.

With respect to classroom teaching experiences, limited attention has been paid to the experiences of Black faculty members who teach critical race and antiracism courses in teacher education programs in Canadian universities. This paper contributes to the literature on the experiences of Black faculty teaching these courses. We draw on CRT to explicate our experiences working with teacher candidates while elucidating the burden of coping with normalized racism that pervades teacher education classrooms. We reflect on our experiences in two teacher education programs, one in Western Canada and the other in Central Canada. The western Canadian program is located in

a large city where the Black population grew by 38% in the five years prior to 2021 (Canadian Press, 2023). The latter institution is in a smaller city with a much smaller Black population. The experience of Black people in both contexts point to racism, prejudice and being rendered invisible (Allen, 2019; Rudder, 2004).

Critical Race Theory Framing

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged from critical legal scholarship in the 1970s to become a full-fledged movement. Matsuda et al. (1993) trace its origins to “a student boycott... in 1981 at Harvard Law School” aimed at compelling the school to hire more scholars of colour (cited in Tate, 1997, p. 227). CRT criticized dominant legal scholarship for focusing on “doctrinal and policy analysis” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20), with little or no attention paid to individual and group accounts that are context-bound. CRT focuses on the “ideological and political struggles” of people of colour (Tate, 1997, p. 230). This is born out of dissatisfaction with social changes in the United States before, during, and after the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s (Taylor, 2009; Lewis, 2009) – in particular, with the slow pace of progress in the areas of legislative districting, criminal sentencing, campus speech codes (Taylor, 2009; Bell, 2009; Parker & Lynn, 2009), and employment equity, where the hiring of African-Americans by institutions of higher learning was concerned.

CRT aims to remedy the structural racism that pervades society, and especially the education system. To paraphrase Joseph-Salisbury (2019, p. 2), as a theory aiming to promote awareness, CRT provides a lens from which we can see the web of endemic whiteness that gives rise to racism and ensnares Black bodies, a process that unfolds within the education system.

To root out white supremacy within educational institutions, CRT urges educators to incorporate counter-narratives into their pedagogy. The counter-narratives must center the experiential knowledge of racialized people (Joseph-Salisbury, 2019), especially when examining the impact of racism on racialized students. CRT highlights the limitations to addressing racial inequities in the education system inherent in the law and in educational policy, such as the inadequacy of multicultural education to take into account the experiences of racialized students. CRT problematizes catchphrases like *neutrality*, *objectivity*, and *meritocracy* used in the education system to conceal oppression, power and privilege. CRT emphasizes context and the criticality of historical analysis of the Black experience, namely the experiential knowledge embedded in the counter-narratives of Black people (Love, 2014; Tate, 1997).

Following from Aylward (2010), we can say that mainstream feminist theory and White-led women’s rights advocacy organizations in Canada are

often silent on issues that impact the oppressions of persons of colour, notably Black women. Mainstream feminists' inaction and solidarity with their male peers on anti-Black racism and gender oppression underwrite white supremacy and dominance (Aylward, 2010, p. 3). Generalized talks about a welcoming multicultural Canada and the education system obscure the true extent of racism, and in this context, anti-Black racism in academia.

People of colour remain underrepresented in faculty positions across Canada (Samuel & Wane, 2005). Kobayashi (2002) noted that, "[while] women of colour hold 18.7% of doctoral degrees in Canada, [they] constitute an average of only 10.3% of faculty positions nationwide" (cited in Samuel & Wane, 2005, p. 76). Canadian universities are yet to address these representation gaps, a reality that bolsters privileging Eurocentric curriculum design and pedagogy with little consideration for equity, antiracism and decolonization (Samuel & Wane, 2005).

Critical Autoethnographic Methodology

Reed-Danahay (1997) describes critical autoethnography as the incisive study of oneself in relation to one or more cultural context(s). Critical autoethnography enables us to use our personal experiences to analyze our encounters with racism while teaching in the teacher education program. Critical autoethnography is an effective approach for exploring personal experiences such as racism and other oppressions (Glesne, 2016). We use self-narratives to foreground our experiences and invite readers to travel with us into a world of our encounters with teacher candidates. We reflect on our teaching evaluations and anecdotal interactions to elucidate the teacher candidates' perceptions of Black professors. The evaluations are used to make sense of the tensions that often arise between professors and students.

Using a critical autoethnographic approach, we position ourselves as the "authors and focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and the created" (Ellis & Bochner, 1996 as cited in Glesne, 2016, p. 259). While critical autoethnography is cathartic, it also allows us, through the medium of our experiences, to reflect on ways of finding emotional approaches to keeping teacher candidates engaged while still pushing them to see the pervasive inequities plaguing the education system. Moreover, it problematizes dominant narratives that purport to promote equity and social justice while denying Black and other racialized students the resources they need to achieve academic success (Glesne, 2016).

We now share our experiences teaching in the teacher education program.

Author's Reflective Experiences: Bathseba Opini

I am a Black faculty member at a university in Western Canada. I teach teacher candidates in the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program. Annual enrolment in the program fluctuates between 600 and 700 students. Although no race-based data is collected I estimate that about 80% of the students enrolled in the program are White.

Having relocated to the West from Central Canada, I was surprised by the widespread, subtle reluctance on the part of many faculty, staff and students to discuss racism in the academy. While teaching in the teacher education program, I continued to experience covert resistance when applying critical race perspectives to interrogate educational inequities. The assumption that Canadian society is inclusive, and that there is little or no racism to speak of, persists. Talking about racism is seen as creating illusions. I was reminded of Skerrett's (2008) observation that:

[While] the existence of racial and ethnocultural discrimination in Canada is most keenly perceived and experienced by visible minority groups and immigrant visible minorities, who make up one half of Canada's total immigrant population... census data that demonstrate inclusive social attitudes and practices in relation to diversity adds complexity to Canada's social landscape which ethnic minorities most strongly perceive as a vertical mosaic. (p. 266)

The province in which I live and work occupies unceded Indigenous lands. It remains a space in which "race and racism are... ingrained in the fabric... of society and... deeply rooted... in ways and systems of knowing" (Milner IV, 2007, p. 390). During the winter of 2013, some students and I were having a discussion about racism and its implications for education, when one teacher candidate commented that White people could no longer find employment in Richmond, BC, a city that has a high concentration of people of Chinese descent. The student's lack of awareness regarding how structural racism operates reminded me of Nicholas Köhler's and Stephanie Findlay's (Findlay & Köhler, 2010) work in *Maclean's* magazine, which focused on the overrepresentation of Asian students at elite Canadian universities (Gilmour et al., 2012). Other racist incidents spring to mind, including the November 2018 filming of a racist video in which a Vancouver secondary school student expressed the desire to kill Black people (Miljure, 2019). After a Black student reported the incident to the school administration, little was done to address this flagrant racism. The failure of the school authorities to act raises serious questions and concerns about how well teachers and administrators are prepared to tackle racism in schools (Miljure, 2019).

According to the Black Canadian Studies Association (2020), anti-Black racism is an ongoing phenomenon despite plentiful talks of inclusivity in academia. Despite its international image as a multiracial country, Black

Canadians are racially stereotyped and profiled. Black men are judged by criminal intentions without reasonable or probable cause (Kumi, 2005). In 2019, during the Canadian Society for the Study of Education conference at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Shelby McPhee, a Black student from Nova Scotia, was accused of stealing a laptop (Black Canadian Studies Association, 2020). In June 2020, Savoy Williams, a Black graduate student attending UBC, was racially profiled and barred from entering their professor's office (Alden & Ha, 2020). These incidents demonstrate that racism in Canada is alive, while revealing how quick institutions are to respond with symbolic measures of issuing statements condemning racist actions. Yet, what is needed are concerted efforts aimed at eliminating the systemic structures that promote racism, which according to Thobani (2022) is a tall order considering that "neither... universities' governing elites nor the state that fund [them] seem able or are willing to robustly pursue" (p. 9) such an outcome. Patchwork practices like inviting Black faculty and students to attend workshops on anti-Black racism while administrators take credit for organizing the sessions, does little to address anti-Black racism. Such approaches, however well-intentioned, are tokenistic and do little to dismantle systemic racism and oppression.

Following the murder of George Floyd in 2020 by police officers in Minnesota, USA, many White people and institutions condemned police brutality against Black people without realizing their complicity in promoting racism. At the same time, emblematic actions in the form of seminars, symposia, webinars and issuing statements on anti-Black racism became the fashion on university campuses. Some educators scrambled to find literature and develop strategies aimed at preparing teachers to work with racially diverse students. Librarians busied themselves cataloguing antiracism readings. A movement emerged in Canadian universities in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder raising a set of moral questions: How truly are universities committed to antiracism model of reform in curriculum and the hiring of Black teachers and professors and more? Why did it take the gruesome murder of a Black man, and others before and after him, to get the attention of universities to start paying attention to anti-Black racism? Are higher education institutions genuinely committed to lasting changes across the board, or is it another chapter of a feel-good choreography to save face? Antiracism education is a key component of meaningful inclusive education. As Egbo (2011) notes, antiracism education ought to "remain a stable feature of life in Canadian K to 12 and postsecondary classrooms. This means that [teacher candidates]... have to learn ways of addressing [racism]... before they become active practitioners in the profession" (p. 23).

My experience teaching antiracism and equity courses suggests that discussions focusing on race and antiracism evoke strong emotional responses in teacher candidates, denial and a high degree of defensiveness, especially on the part of White teacher candidates. At the beginning of these courses, many teacher candidates express interest in examining race and

racism as core equity issues, but often from an instrumental perspective (i.e., a “give me the tools to fix the problem” point of view). This poses problems in that teacher candidates will likely fail to understand that racism manifests in different ways in different contexts. Moreover, while many may be willing to talk about racism, few are ready and equipped with skills to self-reflect on their role in promoting a system that privileges whiteness.

For example, I once taught a course that focused on the relation between education and societal institutions. The majority of the required readings I selected were authored by Black, Indigenous and racialized scholars. This was a conscious effort on my part to highlight the works of these scholars as well as to draw attention to oppression and racism facing Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people. With one exception, all the guest speakers were BIPOC individuals. The object of organizing the course this way during that year was to interrogate the pervasiveness of whiteness in teacher education curricula at my institution, and across Canada.

While some teacher candidates enjoyed the class discussions, selected readings, guest presentations and pedagogy, others responded negatively in ways articulated by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017a), including silence and withdrawal, verbal and non-verbal expressions of anger, sarcasm, and confrontive comments. These responses support Sensoy and DiAngelo’s (2017a) observations that when students experience learning and evidence of inequality that challenge taken-for-granted knowledge and identities, they often resist. The students also resort to simplistic conceptualizations of race and racism, seek to deflect learning and information that make them feel uneasy, and defend more familiar and comforting viewpoints. Chan et al. (2014) also explain that “challenging white privilege and racism is not always welcomed by students (or other faculty) and does generate hostility” (p.18). The students’ reactions were not surprising given that in a 2019-2020 survey of teacher candidates attending the same institution that also focused on antiracism, the survey participants characterized antiracism education as “reductionistic and profoundly unhelpful, a political dogma fraught with false equivalencies, circular logic, and totalitarian tendencies, each of which discourages critical engagement with the subject matter in favour of its complete acceptance for fear of being labelled a racist” (Ogunfeibo, 2021, p. 12; see also Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020).

The students’ resentment of centering the scholarship of Black and Indigenous voices in the course revealed an “aversive” racism, which Dovidio and Gaertner (2004, p. 4) define as racism that operates unconsciously in subtle and indirect ways. Aversive racism creates a cognitive block that makes it difficult for people to think about and understand new information about race and racism, and which contradicts their beliefs and worldview. I wondered if the students would similarly resist course content dominated by Eurocentric literature. Why was there so much such resistance to scholarship by Indigenous, Black and racialized scholars in

the curriculum? How much is too much when Black professors try to de-centre whiteness in the context of their teaching? How might superficial White liberal progressiveness be troubled by such practices? Many teacher candidates fail to see how they are implicated in reproducing racism and are reluctant to speak out against racism and other forms of oppression (Chan et al., 2014; Dei, 2018; Patel, 2021). Teaching is a political act. It is never a neutral activity. The curriculum is political in nature, and we must ask whose politics is validated and who is harmed in the teaching and learning process, particularly in course that examine racism and oppression.

Disaffection on the part of teacher candidates surfaced elsewhere. I recall, while teaching a foundations course, a White male teacher candidate enquiring about my qualifications. This occurred on the first day of class after I had introduced myself and provided a summary of my academic qualifications and career profile. I responded by reiterating my qualifications and career milestones, emphasizing the years that I had worked in the education system at K to 12 and postsecondary levels. The following week the same student approached me and apologized, adding that he never intended to question my ability or professional qualifications or experience. This occurrence corroborates what Henry (2015) shared about her experiences as a lone Black university professor:

I was the only Black full professor on the campus. Even though a full professor, my credentials and competence were questioned by the two White women full professors in the program. I found out how much faculty and students of all ethnicities and genders feel threatened when their female colleague acts like a serious intellectual rather than a mascot, cheerleader or seductress. (p. 596)

It is as if Black professors are not supposed to occupy academic and intellectual spaces. Questioning the qualifications of Black and racialized professors is not new. Hampton (2020, para. 13) opines that “no amount of success is enough to insulate Black faculty from reminders that, in the view of some people, Black people only belong in academic spaces as service workers or support staff.”

Discussions focusing on race and led by Black professors are often seen as advancing a radical leftist agenda. Dei (2020) examines the tendency on the part of White students to report to senior administrators about Black and other racialized professors who teach courses on racism, antiracism and decolonization. They justify this action on the grounds that these professors are, in effect, teaching BIPOC students to hate White people. If these students take exception to a single course calling for a re-examination of the relations among knowledge, power, and oppression, are they ready to move beyond mere talk of racism to addressing the systemic structures that enable racist actions and policies?

During class discussions on anti-Black racism, BIPOC students often watch with alarm as their White counterparts deny the existence of racism

and specifically anti-Black racism outlined in the course readings (Dlamini, 2002; Samuel & Wane, 2005). For us as Black educators, managing confusion in the classroom (i.e., discussing anti-Black racism and other intersecting oppressions) requires a set of pedagogical approaches, including tact to calm White students, tenacity to explain the readings or the authors' arguments (however complex) with clarity, and a façade to "let sleeping dogs lie"; sometimes white fragility on the part of students triggers direct confrontation, which is not the best approach given the tension and its implications on student well being. Of the four approaches, we adopt tenacity which involves walking students, despite occasional interruptions, on the path of dangerous knowledge (Levine-Rasky, 2014) that is less travelled. We do so, devotedly, with the students' best interest at heart.

When Canadian students are exposed to White teachers, administrators and professors throughout their K to 12 and postsecondary years, which happens far more often than not, they come to view the world and their own personal experience through a Eurocentric lens. This effectively precludes their developing a nuanced and balanced understanding of the ways in which race and racism inform the educational outcomes of Black students.

Author's Reflective Experiences: Patrick Radebe

During the past few years, I have been teaching a course that focuses on social differences in education to teacher candidates at a university in Central Canada. The course examines power, privilege and oppression. Here I share the experiences I have had during these years with a view to fostering conversations about the discomfort and hostility that some students experience when they are required to examine racism, ableism, classism, sexism, and homophobia, and to interrogate an education system that is informed by Eurocentric values and norms.

The course syllabus was posted online, and on the first day of class I reviewed the syllabus, the students and I shared our expectations. At the end of the first class, the students evaluated my performance. The feedback was positive and this allowed me to tailor subsequent discussions to meet their needs. In the following weeks there were absences, which I initially attributed to weather conditions. As the semester progressed, however, I noticed an emerging pattern of prolonged silences, surfing electronic pages of cell phones and marked indifference to class discussions.

It became clear that the initial enthusiasm that had marked the first day of class had slowly dissipated. The majority of the students were not ready to learn the hard truths. Efforts to re-direct the class to examining the operational shortcomings within the public education system were often met with indifference. My critical approach to examining the racism that blighted

the education system was sometimes misconstrued by some teacher candidates as an attack on Canada.

In denying the reality of racism and systemic oppression in Canada, a few teacher candidates noted that Canada is both welcoming and multicultural and that people should be judged by what they do not their skin color (Gulliver, 2018; Sensoy & Di Angelo, 2017a). Some verbally commented that they grew up in diverse neighbourhood, attended inner-city schools and were also oppressed (Crosley-Corcoran, 2014). Other students thought that my analysis signalled that I was ungrateful and excessively critical of Canada and the Canadian educational system, notwithstanding the generosity extended to me by my adopted country. For the teacher candidates in this course, pushing back against racist narratives within education was an insurmountable task, especially when the instructor is Black and passionate about antiracism and social justice education. It became clear to me then that occupying a space in the academy as a Black professor, and teaching social justice courses, can be discomfoting and a surprise to some teacher candidates who have never encountered a Black teacher. As Parker and Neville note, owing to the minimal representation of Black teachers in K to 12, college, and university, students often have limited interactions with Black educators in a formal classroom environment: “when these students face Black faculty in the classroom, they often exhibit negative attitudes and inappropriate behaviour” (Parker & Neville, 2019, p. 880). Consequently, they miss out on new and valuable knowledge that Black teachers have to offer.

Scholarship on student resistance to antiracism and social justice courses in teacher education reveals that the teacher candidates’ responses noted above exemplify what some students mete out to Black professors at the end of their courses in the form of teacher evaluations (Daniel, 2019). Hiding behind the anonymity that end of course evaluations afford, some teacher candidates feel free to reveal their true views, however harsh, prejudiced and racist. Because these evaluations are a determining factor in the renewal of contracts, professors teaching racism and antiracism courses are held hostage (Dlamini, 2002). The professors have two options: agree to the demands of the students, or look for another job (Daniel, 2019). Confronted with the prospect of unemployment, many professors opt for the former.

Concerning students’ reaction to gender relations and course material, often White male students tended to be less friendly to female authors in assigned course readings. The opposite was true with male authors. We noticed that students were more likely to confront opposite sex faculty members. We attribute this response to socialization; that is, the belief, in one’s formative years, that women are easy targets and, therefore, can be picked on more easily than men. In “‘A Woman out of Control’: Deconstructing Sexism and Racism in the University,” Ng (1993) highlights the power that White male students wielded over women faculty of colour. In her cross-cultural education course, which examined “minority groups and race relations” (p.

191), an absentee-White male student, who felt sidelined, filed a complaint against Ng for angling the course in favour of women. As a solution to the student's complaint, the administrators and Ng's colleagues proposed that she "tone down her lectures [slightly]; change to less controversial materials; acquire more teaching techniques; and prepare better" (Ng, 1993, p. 190). While this advice may be considered well-intentioned, it doesn't help students to learn and understand the reality of oppression and its consequences on peoples' lives.

Although my teaching experience was emotionally challenging, it was not an exercise in futility. This is because after years of teaching, some of my former students have come to realize the value of educational programs that focus on antiracism and social justice and of conducting a critical analysis of education and societal institutions. For example, one of the students who had resisted engaging in discussions focusing on antiracism and decolonization wrote:

I am back at school, working on my MEd, but, especially over the last week or so in light of the horrific racial events... I want you to know that I will be forever grateful to have had the opportunity to sit in your class and learn from you. It is hard to believe that... years ago I didn't know what white privilege was and didn't know how to even begin to unpack that. I am still unpacking that every day... but I am doing it and am trying to help my students do it. I am still learning how to have uncomfortable conversations because it is important to have these conversations. I am still learning how to ask questions and listen... but I am learning. I am so glad that you are... able to share your wisdom and insights with teacher candidates. I think your course was one of the most impactful in my B.Ed.... my whole learning career. The discussions that happened in that room and the reflective work that I did around your course really changed... me. Thank you. (Personal communication with a former B.Ed student – May 2020)

Such testimonials provide hope in spite of my classroom experiences.

Discussion

Teaching courses on race and racism takes a heavy emotional toll on Black and racialized faculty. Our classroom experiences have taught us that many White students are willing to embrace liberal views on diversity, which we interpret to mean "don't talk about race here." We also realize that discourses on decolonization, antiracism and equity in the education system are sometimes taught in a manner that works to reproduce the status quo. While White liberals and progressives are fully aware that Black people have been colonized and enslaved for centuries and that decolonization is inevitable, they insulate themselves from this reality by paying lip service (Ahmed, 2007, p. 249; Tyler, 2016) to politically correct catchphrases such as

“equality, strength through diversity,” “we are fair,” “Canadians are compassionate and caring people,” and “diversity and inclusion.” This tendency is evident among many teacher candidates who delude themselves into believing that tinkering with the curriculum will translate into rupturing the oppressive power relations and racist practices informing the education system. Changes to curriculum are important; but it is more important to translate those changes into a transformative, antiracist and decolonized system of education which is capable of dismantling white hegemony.

Resistance and classroom confrontations by students reveal that racism poses a significant challenge within the field of teacher education. They confirm what scholars, located mostly in the United States (Bavishi et al., 2010; Littleford, et al., 2010; Perry, et al., 2015), report about racism among university students. These scholars’ work shows that the race of faculty members informs both the content and type of language that are used to complete teacher evaluations. We argue that more work is required to bring teacher candidates to recognize and understand the racial inequities that are prevalent in the education system. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1994), Du Bois hypothesizes that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of [people] in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” (Du Bois, 1994, p. 9). This is true for Black scholars at predominantly white universities. In an era of increasing awareness and talk of post-racism, Black professors find themselves subjected to resistance and gratuitous attacks when teaching subjects related to equity, race and antiracism.

As Dlamini (2002) observes, White students have considerable power over Black professors, a power which they often exercise when misinterpreting the affirmation of alternative knowledges as an annulment of European supremacy (Dlamini, 2002). The author noted that ongoing classroom resistance culminating in inimical feedback recorded in end-of-semester student evaluations reveals resentment on the part of students when exposed to antiracism and decolonizing knowledges vis-à-vis the Eurocentric canon, discourses and perspectives. Denying the privilege that comes with their racial membership, White students assume the position of defenders of the white order and the knowledges that sustain it; and are ready to challenge claims that Canada is not multi-racial enough. They view counter-narratives on white privilege and dominance as fabrications (Dlamini, 2002). Any discussion that foregrounds the experiences of Black students is considered to be a direct attack on Whites.

White teacher candidates also questioned our credentials, which revealed that they covertly doubted our fitness to teach at a postsecondary level. Daniel (2019) elucidates the experience of beleaguered Black professors at the mercy of White students who questioned the professors’ authority and expertise (Daniel, 2019). Black professors are seen as pseudo-academics who might have been hired by universities to fill race quotas. Daniel stated that “the one experience that I am not afforded the dispensation to name is race –

and specifically anything related to Blackness” (2019, p. 22). This amounts to a culture of censorship which is rigorously enforced by White teacher candidates.

The distrust on the part of teacher candidates imposes almost unbearable hardship on Black professors. Some teacher candidates’ blatant hostility to any talk of forms of racism and oppression within the education system causes Black professors physical, emotional and spirit injury. Aware that their tuition is crucial to the operation of the university, students exercise de facto control over the fate of Black professors. By virtue of their instructor evaluations, they determine who is promoted, who gets a tenure track position, or whose contract is renewed.

In “Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia,” Bell (2014) draws parallels between teaching evaluations and occupational mobility of professors. While White male professors, and to a lesser degree White female professors, are granted tenure (at a faster pace), the opposite is true for Black faculty (Bell, 2014). This is a phenomenon that universities attribute to Black professors’ lack of expertise in teaching at universities, and to poor evaluations from students. The reliance on teaching evaluations for tenure is one key tool that universities adopt to maintain whiteness or to compel Black faculty to subject themselves to student threats in order to keep up enrolment and to make everybody happy. This is a crushing experience with health and well-being consequences for Black faculty.

Joseph-Salisbury (2019) argues that within academe, white knowledge systems take centre-stage. Works of the great European philosophers, such as Kant, Hegel, Locke and Hume, all of which discount the intellectual capabilities of Blacks, are revered as the gold standard – the very pinnacle of Western thought – and so as being “central to [the] philosophy [and] sociology] of education” (Joseph-Salisbury, 2019, p. 7). Those Black professors who dare to challenge these pillars of the European Enlightenment are criticized for their lack of objectivity, which is a code word for undermining White dominance (Joseph-Salisbury, 2019).

Teaching White pre-service teachers who have been socialized to believe, for example, in Hegel’s racist idea that Black people are incapable of thought (Chike & Ifenna, 2019; Purtschert, 2010) and so are disinclined to modern education, can be especially challenging because students draw their information from the media, family and friends. To help students unlearn epistemic racism, we introduce anti-racist and Afrocentric texts and resources to deconstruct biases and affirm African ingenuity. We facilitate discussions about knowledge not being neutral but, rather, being situated and contextual. We encourage students to investigate the philosophies, ideologies and motivations that underpin knowledge production and their effect on education. Knowledge, we tell students, is multi-linear and students ought to understand that knowledge advances through discussion and debate. For

example, concepts of reality, whether Western, African or otherwise, are dependent on the subjective experience of the person undergoing the experience. We encourage students to reflect on, and embrace, different bodies of knowledge as contextual, situated and thus political. We strive to create opportunities for students to investigate the impetus behind anti-Black narratives, such as European philosophers, both historical and contemporary (e.g. Bernasconi, 2000; Rushton, 1994; Rushton & Jensen, 2003, 2005), who do not have African lineage, yet are poised, implacably, to typecast Africa and Africans, broadly defined, as a desolate continent and people, and a European burden. Using antiracist pedagogy and critical race theory, we have contributed to supporting students to deprogram their perceptions of Africa from one of helplessness and fatalism to an exploited continent and a people with the potential to develop given the chance.

Examining the attitudes, values, assumptions and norms of a group of White pre-service teachers, Solomon et al. (2005) argued that the concepts they use to understand and interrogate race need to be reassessed if they are to “challenge the marking of whiteness... as the inevitable norm” (p. 148). Interrogating systems of oppression will equip teacher candidates with the requisite tools to understand and address inequities in the education system.

According to Henry and Tator (1994), there is disconnect between the White teacher candidates’ desire to maximize educational outcomes for students, and the teacher candidates’ actions. While many teacher candidates express a commitment to antiracism and social justice education, few are receptive to deeper systemic changes. Henry and Tator (1994) call this conflicting position on equity in education “democratic racism,” which they define as follows:

An ideology which permits and sustains the ability to justify maintaining two apparently conflicting values. One set of values consists of a commitment to a democratic society motivated by egalitarian values of fairness, justice and equality. Conflicting with these liberal values are attitudes and behaviours which include negative feelings about people of colour and which carry the potential for differential treatment or discrimination against them. In its simplistic form, democratic racism is an ideology that reduces the conflict between egalitarian and non-egalitarian values. (p. 3)

For White teacher candidates, the benefits White Canadians enjoy are derived from centuries of hard work by their forebears, and so must be protected even if this requires “using various tools of domination and oppression” (Solomon et al., 2005, p. 154). This includes education to protect white privilege. Picower (2009) argued that White teacher candidates’ understanding of racial markers of difference is derived from their exposure to hegemonic constructs in settings where Whites predominate. Given their limited experience with other races and cultures, White teacher candidates “position Whites as victims of racism and stereotypes” (Picower, 2009, p. 202). They perceive counter-narratives, particularly coming from Black

professors, as an attack on White heritage, automatically inviting denial of white privilege and positioning dominant narratives as incontrovertible truths. Therefore, White Canadians' station in life is perceived as the result of a strong work ethic and not systemic racism. Raised in a predominantly white environment, where the family and the media remain a dependable source of information, White teacher candidates develop a fear of race and reject narratives on colonial barbarity, racism and white supremacy.

DiAngelo (2011) attributes White teacher candidates' antipathy to discussions of racial privilege to "white fragility" (p. 54), which is described as follows:

A state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviours such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviours, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium (p. 54)

White fragility constantly appears in our classes. For example, in the Social Foundations course taught by one of us, a few White students were irritated by discussions on the (mis)education of Blacks under the Segregated School Act (1850) and Indigenous Canadians in residential schools (Winks, 1997). The students preferred that we discuss multicultural education; one of Canada's flagship policies to remedy the "wrongs" of the past in education. Insisting that the history of Canadian education was central to understanding present-day policies often provoked arguments, suggesting that students have had enough of anti-racist "ideology."

Living in a "social environment that protects and insulates students from race-based stress" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 54), White teacher candidates frame their understanding and expectations of society around white dominance. Segregated from the lived experience of Blacks, White teacher candidates experience "comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 55). Living with a siege mentality, White teacher candidates see Black and other racialized peoples' calls for justice as an attempt to turn Whites into punching bags for the transgressions of ancestors, which must therefore be fought. As beneficiaries of white privilege, whose station in life is hardly ever challenged, White teacher candidates find constructive antiracism dialogue frustrating. As DiAngelo (2011) puts it, they "have not... buil[t] the cognitive or affective skills or developed the stamina that would allow for constructive engagement across racial divides" (p. 57).

Normalizing white fragility as a "white thing" – a harmless behaviour to be expected from students – undermines attempts by Black faculty to challenge hegemonic and Eurocentric dominance (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020). By presenting white fragility as a few pre-service students having a bad day, and

by assuming that the behaviour will wear out with time and with sweet talk, teacher education programs inadvertently reinforce racism and encourage white entitlement and gratuitous violence on racialized faculty, thereby cementing observations that universities “serve to uphold whiteness” (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020). Black professors, who find themselves in the storm of student backlash often take on the blame. Feeling abandoned by the university, the professors acquiesce to student discourtesies, thereby losing respect and allyship among racialized students. There are health consequences of white fragility for Black faculty, including stress, feelings of frustration, discouragement, abandonment, and resentment with students and the university.

We agree with DiAngelo (2011) that most predominantly White universities have done little to introduce courses aimed at challenging the Eurocentric worldviews that many White teacher candidates hold. These courses, if they exist, seldom investigate interlocking oppressions. Watchwords, such as urban, inner city and disadvantaged often replace whiteness, overadvantaged or privileged (see DiAngelo, 2011). This practice downplays the awful conditions at educational institutions most Black and racialized students attend. As a result, educational inequities are squarely blamed on Black and racialized students, their families and communities rather than on institutional racism.

Conclusion

Critical discussions on how racism and forms of oppression manifest within the public education system, with efforts to dismantle them, must override discomfort. For antiracism education to be meaningful, teacher education programs must name and teach courses on racism and antiracism rather than circumvent them to mollify teacher candidates. If teacher education programs across Canada were to normalize antiracism education and adopt a collaborative approach to fighting oppression, teacher candidates would come to feel comfortable discussing these topics rather than rejecting them or denigrating Black and racialized professors who teach them.

Here we offer some recommendations aimed at bringing about meaningful change to the system:

- Black faculty should be afforded academic freedom to revise curriculum to include critical race, antiracist and decolonizing perspectives and teachings. Black faculty are dedicated to the intellectual development of students. CRT and antiracist perspectives, among other critical frameworks, are lenses for dissecting societal issues, including the role of the pre-confederation and present-day Canadian state in the creation and reproduction of educational inequities. Offering more courses on African Canadian history will help abate racial and cultural illiteracy among pre-service teachers.

- Universities should commit to recruit more Black teacher candidates to teacher education programs, mentor them, and provide them with scholarships and other support to ensure successful program completion.
- Education faculties need to move beyond using the language of diversity in advertisements which are directed at students and begin hiring Black faculty and staff. Excuses for failing to find recruits or claims that no one applied should be dismissed. Why can't they be found? Why don't they apply? Perhaps it is because experience has taught prospective Black applicants that they won't make the shortlist. A number of universities across Canada have embraced intentional hiring of Black faculty. Why are others reluctant to do so, especially given that many of their students are racialized, yet few of their faculties include Black and racialized professors in tenured or tenure-track positions? Black teacher candidates may only be motivated to enter teacher education programs and eventually become educators if they see that Black and racialized teachers have preceded them. For a long time in Western countries, racialized teacher candidates were found to be deficient when evaluated according to the criteria established by education departments (Levine-Rasky 2000; Picower 2009). Faculties of education should demystify the assumption that teaching, professorship and senior administrative positions are beyond the reach of Black and racialized peoples.

We conclude the paper with an African proverb that some teacher candidates would do well to observe:

A rowdy cub that belittles the lion and lioness (i.e., their parents), loses their guidance and protection. In an aura of invincibility, it wanders off deep into the forest only to find itself on the dinner plate of the hyena. With no way to run back to its parents, the errant cub begins to realize that it could have saved itself from the uncomfortable jaws of the hyena had it listened to the wisdom of the parents it so reviled.

It is crucial to note that teacher candidates resisting the rich and many chapters of Canadian history, for fear that it belittles their White heritage, limits their opportunity for well-rounded preparation to work in racially and culturally diverse schools. Teacher candidates' insufficient knowledge of multiracial Canadian history including Black history, will be called into question by their racialized students, thereby giving them a related taste of the experience, they subjected Black faculty to while they were pre-service students. As educators, we view education as an enormous arena awash with stories that mostly foreground the indispensability of Whites and their accounts of history while signifying the other as a liability. We believe those students who deny themselves the requisite knowledge to address the growing problems confronting education systems do themselves a disservice.

Equipping themselves with multiple knowledges and perspectives is the first step to transforming the education system.

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