

**Check Yo’Self Before You Wreck Yo’Self and Our Kids:  
Counterstories from Culturally Responsive White  
Teachers? . . . to Culturally Responsive  
White Teachers!**

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Numerous studies show the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching with urban students of color. Yet few articulate the dynamics of how *whiteness* impacts the delivery of culturally responsive teaching. Using critical whiteness studies, critical race theory, and Black feminist concepts, this article interrogates the effectiveness of White teachers who engage in culturally responsive teaching without first interrogating their whiteness. Counterstories are used as well as responses from White teacher candidates who matriculated in an urban-focused teacher education program that explicitly focuses on culturally responsive teaching to provide answers to three poignant questions – What happens when cultural responsiveness is co-opted by the White liberal agendas in teacher education? How genuine can the essence of cultural responsiveness be if it narrowly focuses on the “Other” without exploring the “White” self? And, what potential implications does this have on our urban students of color?

**Keywords:** culturally responsive teaching, critical whiteness studies, critical race theory, urban education, teacher education, counterstories, emotions

**I**n this article, counterstories are used to draw attention to what has become a critical issue in the educational practices of White teachers who proclaim to employ culturally responsive practices when teaching students of color. These counterstories are composites of my personal experiences in teaching White teacher candidates that must be shared to better prepare White teachers for acknowledging and coping with their complicit role in maintaining White supremacy. This sharing is necessary before attempting to teach students of color. White teachers have yet to investigate their whiteness, and those who dismiss this notion of self-examination recycle the structure of race and white supremacy in education and society. This article explicates how whiteness operates as invisible to a majority of White teachers while visible to many students of color; and it provides a nuanced understanding of how race, racism, and white supremacy operate in our schools and society (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009).

If White teachers want to support the healthy development of racial identity among students of color, they must acknowledge the implications of the overwhelming presence of whiteness indicative of the majority of urban schoolteachers (Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 2001); and, they must as White racial identity scholar Helms (1990) argues, “take the journey himself or herself” (p. 219). White teachers must also acknowledge the emotional and mental processes that must be undertaken to move from culturally responsive “White teachers?” to culturally responsive

“White teachers!” In other words, White teachers must “check” themselves before they wreck themselves and our urban students of color. The scenario that follows is about Haley, a White teacher armed with training in culturally responsive urban teaching and a fierce determination to close the achievement gap between African American, Latino, and White students. However, she lacks awareness of whiteness.

*Haley, a white teacher, strides into her urban first-period classroom full of students of color. “I can do this. I know how to handle them. I can do this,” she whispers to herself. Upon confidently scanning the room and mentally reviewing her prepared welcome speech about who she is, how she refuses to give up on them, and how she choose this urban school because it was her calling – something modeled to her in countless “White savior teacher” films – she is interrupted with rolled eyes and groans of “oh no, not another one!” Knowing these students consider her “yet another nice White lady,” (see [“MADTV “Nice White Lady” parody](#)), Haley becomes overwhelmed with what to say. She panics and her face turns visibly red. Her palms sweat and a lump forms in her throat. She begins to fear one of them might call her a racist if she mentions anything about race. “I thought I knew all about them,” she cries to herself.*

Despite learning about their culture, responsive pedagogies, and languages, Haley was emotionally and mentally unprepared to deal with her whiteness, a social construction that embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions and experiences, epistemology, emotions and behaviors that get normalized because of white supremacy. Essentially, Haley’s white liberalist educational training, which mainly focused on learning about the “Other” helped her mask and deflect insecurities of learning about herself. Did she really think she could waltz into an urban classroom, rich with students of color, without acknowledging that they would recognize her as White?

Being “White” means something beyond a cultural marker that defines who is at the apex of the racial structure (Allen, 2005; Gillborn, 2006; Haney-Lopez, 2006). Despite Haley’s training in culturally responsive teaching, she never engaged the topic of race, racism, and white supremacy. Without having learned critical racial analyses, Haley is unprepared to deal with her own White emotions or how to identify beyond a common utterance of “*I know, I know. I’m White.*” Yet, regardless of whether Haley is consciously or subconsciously aware of what it means to be White or whether she can understand how being White intimately impacts how people of color experience their racialized lives, she relies on emotional responses of whiteness (Matias, in press). Haley quickly changes the topic, turns away, defends herself, and projects her White guilt onto people of color instead of positively working through the painful emotions of realizing her White self. “*Now that you notice I’m White, should I notice you are all Black and Brown?*” she angrily retorts to her urban students of color. Despite her culturally responsive teaching certificate, is Haley a *culturally responsive White teacher?*

As a teacher educator of color in an urban-focused, socially-just teacher preparation program located in a large urban middle-west institution, I am preoccupied with effectively preparing urban culturally responsive teachers. Another aspect of my intrigue is that I grew up in urban public schools taught by liberal White teachers who embodied philosophies and discourses of white saviority that eerily still inhabit the mindsets of my teacher candidates (Matias, in Press). And, in my three years of teaching in this program, I have only had three candidates of color who had to muster enough strength to emotionally survive the colorblind ideologies of their white

peers and a curricula that focused on “helping” students of color, like themselves. Therefore, it is instructive for me to theorize about the effectiveness of culturally responsive training for White teachers who rarely engage the word race, have not had prolonged relationships with people of color, or have never stepped inside an urban community of color.

Using transdisciplinary approaches in critical race theory, critical whiteness studies, and Black feminism, I theoretically explore the emotional rhetoric that undergirds culturally responsive teaching. I also pay homage to scholars of color – many of whom were the very same students that the literature of culturally responsive teaching once fought for. In my *Social Foundations and Issues of Cultural Diversity in Urban Education* course, I use literature and references from scholars of color and critical White allies who address the emotional, mental, structural, philosophical, and human project of race with a critical racial lens. Then, I apply concepts from critical whiteness studies to deepen the understanding of White teachers, many of whom teach in urban classrooms that are heavily populated with students of color. I also engage in emotionality, a process of feelings. To illuminate these feelings, I include counterstories of my experiences and the actual responses of my White teacher candidates (i.e., pre-service teachers) who matriculated in this urban-focused teacher education program, which has a strong commitment to culturally responsive teaching. These responses, which were shared with me in the social foundations course, are used to illuminate the racial dispositions that impact the genuineness of culturally responsive White teachers, who have yet to interrogate their whiteness. I also merge racial analyses with cultural responsiveness to demonstrate how the two can never be divorced from each other. Finally, I offer cautions, implications, and recommendations for training the next generation of culturally responsive teachers who are not indoctrinated with the mindset of saving students of color, and I present hopes for culturally responsive White teachers who have learned to bind their liberation of White racial repression to the liberation of people of color’s racial oppression. Until White teachers learn how to be culturally responsive to themselves in a non-dominant recycling manner, they cannot be masters of cultural responsiveness because they have yet to learn this process.

### **Being Emotionally Responsive to Cultural Responsiveness**

Culturally responsive teaching is a socially-just response to teacher education for redefining, reframing, and reconceptualizing deficit perceptions of urban students of color to students who are culturally-rich and equipped with their own reserves of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). The seminal works in culturally responsive teaching explicate this and is demonstrated by Gay (2000), who argues that culturally responsive teaching moved our epistemological orientation of teaching students of color from “don’t have, can’t do” to “do have, can do” (p. 181). While this is a shift from deficit to dynamic thinking (Ford & Grantham, 2003), it is not a makeshift cure-all of prior racist practices that initially denied students of color a place for educational freedom. hooks (1994), stated, “I lost my love of school” (p. 3), to describe experiences of being taught by racist White teachers after racial desegregation. hooks’ perception can be viewed as a clear expression of how students of color experience the school system and the complicit role – intentional or not – of teachers themselves.

Thus, culturally responsive teaching is not merely a response to teaching better. It is a civil rights movement that reclaims hope and mirrors Bell’s (1992) parable of “Afrolantica.” Like Bell’s parable, this hope is propelled and substantiated by the deep cries of scholars of color, their allies, and their fight for their children who could no longer be denied the right to a fair

education because of systemic racist practices. Likewise, culturally responsive teaching is not a simple intellectual revolution. It is a rationally-emotional revolution based on the humanizing project of racial justice for all; and not just about the cultures of Black and Brown students but about how these students were racially positioned in a racist system that made and continues to make culturally responsive teaching an avenue for fighting back.

From the shadows of a racist society, culturally responsive teaching provides an educational future for students of color, and it provides an avenue for them to reclaim their worthiness for proper consideration of their educational needs. This is exemplified in book dedications, critical inquiries, and ending remarks of scholars of color who pioneered cultural responsiveness in teacher training and teaching. For example, Gay's (2000) conceptualization of culturally responsive teaching is about learning, respecting, and recognizing the cultures of students of color, implying a pre-existing disrespect and lack of recognition of students of color. She dedicates her book to "Vida: a shining star who illuminated what many others considered impenetrable darkness," as well as to "students everywhere." These remarks demonstrate that it was never just about the scholar; rather, about equity for all students, especially students of color. Nor were these remarks about best practices in a colorblind fashion but instead about a dedicated project for humanity. Notwithstanding the minimization of the cultural wealth (Yosso & Garcia, 2007) of students of color, Gay wrote passionately about culturally responsive teaching as an alternative to normative White-ist teaching.

Additionally, Ford and Grantham (2003) argue that deficit thinking is the culprit for racialist views of students of color. They describe deficit thinking thusly, "when educators hold negative, stereotypic, and counterproductive views about culturally diverse students and lower their expectations of these students accordingly" (p. 217). Extending this definition into a racial analysis, these negative, stereotypical, and counterproductive views are simply racist attitudes held by teachers who happen to be almost ninety-percent White. Though absent of a racial analysis, critical whiteness studies have established that Whites who invest in whiteness inoculate themselves with a sense of authority, superiority, and purity (Thandeka, 1999) that directly impact how they perceive those racially defined as non-White or Other (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). To assume this does not surface within the context of the classroom is erroneous as it inadvertently maintains how whiteness is upheld in schools and society.

Culturally responsive teaching will forever be about a struggle against the whiten-ing of education. Emotionally invoking as it may seem, all of these scholars – consciously or subconsciously – were responding to a pre-existing loveless condition of the largely White teaching force providing instruction to students of color. Despite self-proclaiming love for students of color, the ocular of whiteness filtered out the context of racism and white supremacy such that the ninety percent White teaching force needed to be reminded that what they considered "loving" was, in fact, not loving. Like Valenzuela (1999) asserts, there needs to be an authentic care that develops between teacher and student, lest recycle of the sadomasochistic relationship whereby the teacher enacts racializations that ultimately make students of color lose their "love of school" (hooks, 1994, p. 3). Hence, during a time when we are "racing to the top" in educational rhetoric and policies, how often are race and race dynamics actually entertained in this loveless relationship of teaching? When applying the emotionality of whiteness, how does the love in teaching pervert itself such that White teachers believe they are loving their students

of color when, in fact, they may be fulfilling their own narcissistic need to “save” them (Ahmed, 2004; Corbett, 1995; Fanon, 1967; Hook, 2011)? This is to say, beyond fulfilling White teachers’ self-gratification of saving students of color, how can they rethink their emotionality so that they can provide the authentic care and love needed to teach students of color?

### **Theorizing Whiteness and Culturally Responsive Teaching**

I have seen situations where White women hear a racist remark, resent what has been said, become filled with fury, and remain silent because they are afraid. That unexpressed anger lies within them like an undetonated device, usually to be hurled at the first woman of color who talks about racism (Lorde, 2007, p. 127).

Recently, I served as moderator for the Colorado viewing of *Precious Knowledge* (2011), a film about the struggles of preserving Mexican American Studies in the Tucson Unified School District. After the film, hands from the audience graced the air and a Latina Denver Public School teacher stood up with tears in her eyes and asked how she could help. Next, a Latino campus diversity officer talked about the importance of Raza programs and how his college journey in ethnic studies helped him regain his ethnic confidence. Upon hearing this, a self-identified Chicana high school student gave a tearful explanation of her yearning to be taught in this manner – she exasperated, “*Our teachers just don’t get it.*” Heads nodded around her and adults looked at her with understandable eyes. Finally, a White teacher education professor stood up and asked, “*Well, the film didn’t show any White teachers. Can’t White teachers do this?*” This mind-provoking question caused a few people to shift uncomfortably in their seats. I explained that White teachers were indeed part of the program, but had chosen not to be in the film. The White professor persisted with, “*Well, why wouldn’t they want to be filmed? If they showed the White teachers, this film would get more press and it would show that White teachers could do this. It’s not really about the ethnic program.*” The discomfort in the room grew. Many in attendance were criticalists, allies, and/or decolonized people of color. I collected myself and remembered not to center whiteness in this space, one that was specifically designed to give safety to people whose tears paralleled the cries of the students in the film. In doing so, I knew I had to suppress operations of whiteness so that the racial angst of a few White folks would not co-opt the space and not expect others to make them feel better again (Matias, 2012). Finally, I said:

It’s not about whether or not White teachers can do this. Rather, it’s about what is the necessary prerequisite that White teachers need to be fully prepared to teach students of color? If one is still questioning the relevance of race and ethnic studies, then she or he can’t effectively teach students of color. White supremacy manifests itself in education such that all curriculum and pedagogies are about White culture and pejorative White perspectives of people of color. These programs finally give students of color a space to learn about themselves in non-pejorative ways. If this puzzles you, then it’s time to learn how race operates in schools and society.

I share this counterstory because in presenting work in race research, Whites often ask me how they can be anti-racist. Yet, they seem to co-opt the space by asking why should they feel bad, guilty, or ashamed? Although seemingly sincere, my experiences in teaching cohorts of White

teachers and doing lectures to largely white audiences suggest that they are not aware of, nor are they prepared for, how emotionally draining, mentally taxing, and vulnerable they must make themselves in order to be true White allies. Some assume there is a culturally competent checklist for understanding how to teach and relate to students of color, and by mastering it, they become culturally competent.

In this emotional deflection, they usurp the glory, warmth, and recognition of being race champions without ever giving credence to people of color who are burdened with it everyday. Thus, White teachers (or white allies) who self-claim to be culturally relevant but do not engage in the emotional burden of race misunderstand the following:

1. designation of who is and is not culturally relevant or an ally should be the sole purview of people of color;
2. in being an ally, one must reject whiteness everyday, which results in an emotional burden, vulnerability, and ostracism from the dominant White group; and
3. what whiteness is all about, unless they put forth the effort to learn about their own whiteness via critical whiteness studies, just as racial and ethnic minorities learn about themselves in race and ethnic studies programs.

Now, I draw from critical whiteness studies to describe the multi-dimensions and complexities of whiteness and the pre-existing racial condition that has long marginalized students of color and rendered cultural responsiveness so relevant.

### **Critical Whiteness Studies in Teaching**

Critical whiteness studies is an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the social (Brodkin, 2006; Frankenberg, 1993), economic (Massey & Denton, 1993; Roediger, 2005), political (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Lipsitz, 2006), legal (Lopez, 2006), educational (Leonardo, 2009), philosophical (Mills, 2007), and literary (Morrison, 1992) creation, maintenance, and proliferation of whiteness. Whiteness, though socially constructed, is an ideology, epistemology, emotionality, and psychology that often produces concrete systemic racism by normalizing these elements as invisible (Picower, 2009). Since Whites and whiteness dominate the field of education, they play an important role in how education operates (Leonardo, 2009). This is disconcerting because educators acknowledge the ubiquity of whiteness, but schools, which are microcosms of society, rarely do. This was historically demonstrated after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), when many African American teachers were pushed out of teaching and White teachers were repositioned as the sole providers of education (Hudson & Holmes, 1994, Tillman, 2004).

In terms of teaching, critical whiteness studies disclose an overwhelming presence of whiteness in teacher education and how leaving it uninterrupted maintains its permanence. Sleeter (2001) asserts that the primary problem is the teaching pipeline – from pre-service to teacher educators – which is overwhelmingly White, and maintains that White pre-service teachers (and I argue, the White teacher educators who train them) have preconceived prejudices against African

American and Latino students whereby they end up “completely unprepared for the students and the setting” (p. 95).

Sleeter recommends that teacher education increase the diversity of its teaching pipeline. However, this has yet to be a nationally distributed concept, thus promulgating two situations. First, within a critical whiteness perspective, it maintains teachers of color as a ‘minority’ with respect to the overwhelming presence of whiteness; their ideas, perspectives, and curricular approaches are rendered biased, incompatible, or un-collaborative; and they experience extreme hostility in higher education (de Jesús & Ma, 2004; Gutierrez y Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). Secondly, the critical race theory suggests that teacher education will continue to be a white supremacist enterprise that produces more White teachers with white-sensitive curricula, white strategies, and white standards against which their future students of color will be measured.

Since I have only taught three teacher candidates of color in my three years of university teaching, I experience the overwhelming presence of whiteness everyday. To gauge the level of this presence, I started administering a pre and post survey in my social foundations course, the first course in our teacher education program which focuses on foundational approaches to understanding race, class, and gender in urban education using critical race, culturally responsive, and critical whiteness approaches. The surveys administered were not a part of a large study. Being the only tenured-line faculty of color in this program, I used the surveys as an instructional tool to gauge the level of whiteness that will be emotionally exerted when I begin teaching about race. For example, one White candidate commented on how learning about race, class, and gender from a White male professor could be different from a female professor of color. This candidate retorted:

My social movements professor was a White middle-class male and I felt that I learned a lot from him. I also felt that I got a *non-biased* opinion of the subject matter, which when confronted with the facts, provoked strong emotion. In other words, by having it come from someone who was removed from the subject allowed the facts to speak for themselves. I imagine that if I had a colored-female, I would have gotten less from the class. This is because she would have been extremely connected to the subject therefore is more emotional about it. For me, her emotion would have detracted from the emotion of the raw facts.

The candidate’s need to mark the intellect of women of color perfectly aligns with the literature concerning how professors of color experience White resistance in the academy (Rodriguez, 2009; Stanley, 2006). This candidate marks intellect (Orelus, 2011), presumes bias (de Jesús & Ma, 2004), and uses gender and racial stereotypes to justify her biases that she then projects onto the female professor of color. When asked if they have had teachers or professors of color before, some White candidates responded with the following:

I have had no teachers of color while growing up. I do not think it has had an impact on me because I have been inside urban schools so I see what it is all about.

I have had no professors of color. During my first semester, I noticed a few professors of color and it struck up a certain emotion in me. Not that I didn't think they were capable of being professors, rather I simply found it odd.

I have not had any teachers/professors of color throughout all of my schooling. This lack of teachers/professors of color really hasn't impacted me. I feel that with or without teachers/professors of color, I will still get a good education. I feel that the color of skin does not determine the person, the person inside determines the person [emphasis added].

These White teacher candidates never had an educator of color. Yet, they took liberty in normalizing such an absence as having no impact on them, while labeling the presence of educators of color as “odd.” Herein lies the contradiction. When Whites who are entrenched in their whiteness project bias onto people of color, they also normalize their White position and the absence of people of color as being race-neutral or as having no impact. Although educators of color are labeled “odd,” the true and ironic oddity is that these candidates feel they can have no experiences with people of color and still claim to “know what it’s all about.” This ‘impact’ is clearly illustrated in the counterstory below.

*During an invited lecture in the program, a nineteen-year-old White female who reportedly had no relationships with people of color responded aloud about one of my articles. She yelled, “Who the fuck does this bitch think she is?”*

Clearly, the impact of having no people of color with whom to interact can lead to an entitled feeling of White superiority such that this statement becomes an exemplary model of how whiteness gets exerted and co-opts a culturally-responsive space. That is to say, it does not matter how much one can learn about cultural responsiveness because Whiteness reigns supreme. This is the confidence found in the emotion of whiteness. Since whiteness often goes unchecked, it is only until White emotions become unfettered (e.g., reading my article in the above scenario) that it rears its ugly head in maintaining its dominance (e.g., feeling entitled to scream and curse at a professor in a class).

When White teacher candidates were asked if they considered themselves an anti-racist educator, they responded:

I don't think I would be considered completely anti-racist by a general consensus of the colored population. I have certain prejudices that I don't believe to be racially motivated.

Racism is not an issue for me. Therefore I have a hard time saying that I am an anti-racist educator, meaning I don't plan on going out of my way to show special treatment to students of color. Rather, I plan on treating them the same way I would treat any other student. With that said, I do believe in racial equity but see myself as already taking part in equality.

Sadly, when White teacher candidates refuse to identify themselves with anti-racist ideals and impart colorblind ideology, false notions of racial equity, and admit to having prejudices of people of color, it contradicts the process of becoming a culturally responsive White

teacher. Ergo, White teachers then have two options in their role within the racial structure. First, they can say nothing, maintain a false colorblind ideology, and refuse to learn about race and whiteness, which ultimately defaults to maintaining White racial dominance. Secondly, they can revolt against a supremacist school system when they choose to self-initiate anti-racist endeavors, a process needed to become White allies and thus effective culturally responsive teachers (hooks, 2003; Tatum, 2009). As Johnson (2006) argues, in order to effectively refute racism, sexism, and classism, we must first “see and talk about what’s going on” (p. 126). Until White teachers assume the onus of dismantling the White supremacist structures by learning, talking, seeing, and feeling what race, White supremacy, and whiteness entail, they remain complicit in its maintenance. The expectation then is that White teacher candidates who plan to teach in urban communities that have a large population of students of color must be committed to this humanizing project, lest they subject their students of color to racist approaches, ideologies, and curriculum that go unnoticed.

Therefore, the emotional and psychological aspects of whiteness must be examined to investigate how Whites emotionally and mentally invest in whiteness, an investment that hinders the ability to become a culturally responsive White teacher. Thandeka (1999), for example, argues that whiteness is a form of child abuse in teaching White children how to be White and forcing them to forget the racialization process is in and of itself child abuse. Further, Thandeka asserts “the process of forgetting their pre-white selves began to empty the workers’ core sense of self” (p. 69), and when this happens, White children develop a deep White shame about race. Though they bear witness to race, they are forced to adopt a false colorblind ideology, lest they be ostracized from the White community. Suffice it to say, White children realize they are “someone who is living a lie” because they are asked to repress a racial reality to be White and everyone else is made to be complicit, through racial supremacy, in ensuring that the lie is never revealed (Thandeka, 1999, p. 34).

As a teacher educator who teaches mainly White teacher candidates, many of whom will soon be in urban classrooms with students of color, my concern is what happens to the White child when she or he grows up and decides to teach urban students of color without ever recognizing the lie of colorblindness? For example, one White teacher candidate professed many times in the social foundations course that race was not an issue. This candidate claimed not to see race and viewed everyone the same. However, upon learning more about whiteness, racism, and emotionality, the candidate became so agitated, and at one point screamed, “*But we have Kobe Bryant, Oprah, and Obama!*” a comment that inherently refuted the initial claim about not “seeing” race. Upon this outburst, the candidate began crying and the other White teacher candidates came to the rescue assuring this candidate that “it is not about race.” Analyzing this emotional outburst provides an inordinate insight as to how whiteness is an emotional investment that exemplifies how Whites feel the need to self-protect their core sense of racialized White identity. On the other hand, not exploring this emotionality leaves whiteness intact thereby inhibiting White teachers’ ability to engage in culturally responsive teaching.

### **Marrying Racial Analysis with Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Culturally responsive teaching is not only a pedagogical methodology for combating the racist practices of classroom teaching, it is also an approach for reintegrating knowledge that was initially marginalized due to systemic racism. Culturally responsive teaching evolved, in part, as

a result of racist practices, which did not account for students of color nor recognize the importance of the racial and cultural experiences these students brought into the classroom. Although cultural elements are essential, the dynamics of race and culture can never be separated because the very structure of race initially stratified which culture counted and which did not (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Additionally, *culture* and *race* cannot be used interchangeably because *culture* refers to “a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavior standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as others” (Gay, 2000, p. 8), whereas *race* is defined as “a socially constructed category” (Solorzano, 1998, p. 128) used to enact structural racism.

Beyond ideological interpretations, Bonilla-Silva (2001) provides a materialist interpretation of racism, which acknowledges the “social edifices... erected over racial inequality” (p. 22). Although culture defines the value system for which groups of people exist, race and its enactment through racism and white supremacy is how groups of people are structured within a society that maintains a hegemonic power (Gramsci, 1971). Therefore, without a racial analysis of the purpose, positioning, and liberating employment of culturally responsive teaching, we inadvertently silence the main societal problems of education. Suffice it to say that we cannot cure a condition if we focus solely on its symptoms and possible treatments, and not on the root cause of the condition.

If culturally responsive teaching is a treatment to cure an educational ill, we must investigate what the illness is and what the possible symptoms of this illness are. Focusing on educational gaps, dropout rates, and low test scores are symptoms of the problem. The problem itself lies in the systemic racist practices that allow white supremacy and whiteness to reign supreme in education; and while maintaining white supremacy, the root cause of this condition also hurts students of color. This is the marriage between race and culture, both distinct units of analysis, yet both dependent on each other. To analyze one without the other is tantamount to asking Black feminists to solely consider either race or gender without recognizing that in its interconnectedness they find a more complete analysis (Lorde, 2001).

### **To a Happier Ever After: Caution and Hopes for Culturally Responsive White Teachers**

Beware the false motives of others  
Be careful of those who pretend to be brothers  
And you never suppose it's those who are closest to you, to you  
They say all the right things to gain their position  
Then use your kindness as their ammunition  
To shoot you down in the name of ambition, they do. ~ *Lauryn Hill*

In her song, “*Forgive Them Father*,” Lauryn Hill (1998) cautions listeners to not trust freely without critique, for deception can be under the guise of smiles and seemingly benevolent actions. Applied to teaching, caution should not only be directed to students of color but instead to White teachers who truly believe themselves to be culturally responsive educators. Beyond learnt vocabulary, theories, and pedagogical strategies, the question that needs to be self-asked and continually self-answered by White teachers is “Am I emotionally committed to being a

culturally responsive teacher even if it means learning about how I am repressing my understanding of race and whiteness merely because it makes me feel uncomfortable?”

For White teachers to become culturally responsive teachers, they must first understand the context that gives them white privilege. One way to do this is to embed critical whiteness studies with culturally responsive and critical race literature. That is, instead of focusing only on students of color in urban teacher education, White teacher candidates need to first learn about their white selves. Another avenue teacher education must explore is transdisciplinary studies. Too often teacher education becomes insular citing its own field. Yet, as teachers, we acknowledge that education is all around us.

Teacher education must also explore philosophy, sociology, anthropology, literature, and ethnic studies that shed light on understanding race holistically. Additionally, teacher education needs to begin generating theories of its own rather than borrowing from other fields without properly theorizing how its application transforms in our field. For instance, the transition of critical race theory from legal studies to education has generated a profound litany of research that theorizes its unique transformation in education. Likewise, teacher education needs to begin looking at its own theories of critical whiteness studies, critical race theory, and cultural responsiveness. Instead of balkanizing them into pluralistic silos, teacher education has the potential to show how these theories marry in the art and science of teaching.

Finally, becoming a culturally responsive teacher is more than learning about cultures. It is a process for living racial justice, which requires the same feelings of rage bell hooks (1995) had for racism. This captures an anger that “lies inside me like I know the beat of my heart and the taste of my spit” (Lorde, 2007, p. 153). Most noteworthy is that culturally responsive teachers cannot distance themselves from this anger of injustice and when White teachers realize they are as much a part of race as people of color, they cannot help but get angry. This is not to be confused with anger that stems from spite – it is instead a deep anger for human pain, a swift refusal to let it continue to happen. Only then does culturally responsive teaching turn into a project of the self and one’s relationship to society instead of a project to merely identify effective practices of the “Other.”

In terms of teacher education, White teacher candidates need to re-experience the pain of racism. This can be done by drawing from narrative articles of scholars of color that depict the emotional trauma of racism and white antiracist scholarship on the emotional shift of becoming a white ally. Using a transdisciplinary approach, teacher education can borrow these narratives from Black feminism, critical race theory, and race and ethnic studies.

Lastly, if a white teacher remains emotionally frozen to race and racism, this teacher then recycles the social anesthesia that numbs our hearts, making it “easier to crucify myself...than to take on the threatening universe of whiteness by admitting that we are worth wanting each other” (Lorde, 2007, p. 153). Like Lorde, we – teacher-educators, teachers, and students – are worth wanting each other because we believe in the humanly process of education. We are worth a commitment to racial justice despite the discomfort of unveiling whiteness. And for our students of color, they are worth more than just another nice “White lady.”

## AUTHOR NOTES

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