

Inquiry Into (In)ability to Navigate Dissidence in Teacher Education: What it Tells Us About Internalized Racism

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In this study, the author, a teacher educator of color, explores her inability to successfully navigate a tension-filled moment in a teacher education diversity course while discussing ethnic and racial stereotypes. More specifically, using “inquiry as stance” and relocating personal pedagogical practice to social and critical practices through the conceptual lenses of “white racial supremacy” and “double consciousness”, she investigates her dilemma that she uncomfortably confronts when a student of color speaks up against the majority of students in class who are white. In working through and theorizing the author’s inner conflict, as she feels the commitment to support the student of color while also seeking validation by the majority students, she concludes that teacher educators of color committed to social justice work can unwittingly alienate the very students of color they are committed to inspire as an effect of internalized white supremacy. In the final section, the author argues that internalized white racial supremacy is an inevitable condition of structures of racial oppression, and a failure to recognize and study internalized white racial supremacy can hamper diversity and multicultural education that are meant to combat racism and further perpetuate existing racial hierarchies.

In the present time in which schools and societies are increasingly becoming diverse in many places in the world, and yet the gap between the demographics of teacher population and student population is rapidly widening (e.g., Dingus, 2008; Philip, 2011), educators of color bring unique educational perspectives to teaching and learning. In this regard, Foley, Levinson, and Hurtig (2000-2001) identified four major contributions made by scholars of color as follows: (1) scholars of color have disrupted “deficit explanation of the lower achievement rates of students, teachers, and parents of color . . .” (p. 80); (2) scholars of color have assumed and shown the success and capacity of students, teachers, and parents of color; (3) scholars of color have documented which “pedagogical and curricular practices help marginalized students, teachers, and parents produce success” (p. 80); and (4) scholars of color have advocated for multiple decolonizing and collaborative research approaches, which contributed to research methodology. Hence, the influence of the counter-hegemonic voices of academics of color in transforming white-dominated field of education is undeniable. In pedagogical settings, racial minority teachers are shown to have a positive impact on the social-emotional development of American minority children, and teachers of color can serve as role models for students of color (Wright, Gottfriend, & Le, 2016).

However, automatically assuming that educators of color and their thinking and action can transcend the system of domination is also problematic. Spivak (2003) noted the need to deconstruct one’s implicatedness in dominant systems of knowledge and representations. In representing herself as a scholar of color who is in a privileged position as an academic in the West, Spivak (2003) contended that there is a need

to be hyper-self-reflexive and to acknowledge her own complicity in perpetuating the system of domination. According to Spivak, the internalization of domination and oppression is a phenomenon that affects all people. Following this line of thinking, educators of color must be self-reflexive about their own internalized system of domination in order to fully pedagogically benefit their students, including students of color.

As a teacher educator of color working with predominantly white pre-service teachers in a rural Midwestern state in the US, one of my major pedagogical commitments is to support pre-service teachers in understanding the practical consequences of social, racial, economic and cultural hierarchies; concentrations of power and control; and oppression. Relatedly, my commitment also extends to improving the educational opportunities of students of color at all levels. I seldom work with pre-service teachers of color, and when I do have the opportunity to work with them in my class, I am very excited. However, I have noticed that there are times when I unwittingly alienate the very student I am committed to inspire in my class. There are times when my commitment, as well as personal and professional knowledge, misalign with my pedagogical practices in working against racial hierarchies and supporting students of color. To this end, this paper is an inquiry into my inability, as a teacher educator of color committed to social justice work, to respond to a tension-filled moment involving a pre-service teacher of color in an undergraduate diversity class. This study’s major contribution is thus exploration of how unexamined internalized white racial supremacy operating in a teacher educator of color can become an impediment in facilitating the “difficult dialogue” (hooks, 1994), the transformative potential of diversity, and multicultural teacher education courses.

Authors of numerous existing studies documented the racially marginalized experiences of teachers and teacher educators of color (e.g., Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009; Kelly & McCann, 2014; Tuitt, Hanna, Martinez, Salazar, & Griffin, 2009). An ample body of research also examines the taken-for-granted whiteness of teaching, whereby the authors explore how white educators perpetuate and support racial ideologies in their teaching (e.g., Galman, Pica-Smith, & Rosenberger, 2010; McIntyre, 2002; Picower, 2009). However, research on how the forces of whiteness may manifest in the work of educators of color is scarce. According to Pyke (2010), internalized racism remains understudied, as the topic seems to be a taboo largely because of “a concern that the racially subordinated will be held responsible for re-inscribing White supremacist thinking, casting it as their shortcoming rather than a problem of White racism” (p. 559). In this regard, Padilla (2001) noted that internalized racism is *not* the consequence of any weakness, ignorance, or other shortcoming of the oppressed. In fact, human actions and thinking are impacted by the structure of the relations of domination and institutions (Dubois, 1903/1994; Fanon, 1967). More specifically, hooks (2013) argued that white supremacist thinking informs the consciousness of everyone regardless of skin color. Concurring with such school of thought about the inevitable internalization of the structure of domination, I argue that further inquiry into how educators of color can unintentionally and unconsciously reinforce the system of racial hierarchy in pedagogical setting is clearly needed. In particular, the unique experiences and invaluable perspectives contributed by educators of color demand more attention.

In the following section, I discuss the methods and modes of inquiry that inspired this study paper, before exploring the notion of “white racial supremacy” and “double consciousness” as the theoretical frameworks that guided the study. “Double consciousness” is adopted in conjunction with “white racial supremacy” to show the psychological conflict of two-ness that I as a teacher educator of color experience. Next, I describe the context of this inquiry with the detailed notes on what I mean by a tension-filled moment in which I was unable to respond to dissidence in my pedagogical practice. In the final discussion, I conclude that the internalization of white racial supremacy is the inevitable consequence of the system of racial domination. I thus argue that studying internalized racial oppression can advance the diversity and multicultural pedagogy committed to work against racial inequality because not attending to inevitably internalized racism can unwittingly reinforce the forces of domination even by teachers of color. I also offer a few implications and suggestions for the field of teacher

education and teacher educators of color engaging in “inquiry as stance” and moving from “personal to critical” self-reflection.

Methods and Modes of Inquiry

In this work, I adopted a qualitative method of autoethnography (Chang, 2008). Chang, Ngunjiri, and Herenandez (2013) defined autoethnography as “a research method that enables researchers to use data from their own life stories as situated in sociocultural contexts in order to gain an understanding of society through the unique lens of self” (p. 18). As will be discussed more fully in the following section, the pedagogical experience discussed in this study provides rich and powerful data that calls for detailed analysis even though it occurred within a single class period. Another study written by the author on the topic of the internalization of racism with a wider set of data can be found elsewhere (Author, 2014). Informed by the social and critical understanding of internalization of racism discussed in the previous section, autoethnography as a method is useful for this study, as I am interested in investigating internalized racial oppression within myself as a teacher educator of color who is committed to social justice work. My aim is revealing white domination and white privilege through my own pedagogical practices by situating the vignette in a broader sociocultural context. In particular, I place value on being able to analyze my innermost thoughts pertaining to the incident that will be discussed below in relation to my personal background, as this is something I may not be comfortable sharing with other researchers. In adopting the method of autoethnography, the data analysis of my own reflection started with memory work, where I recalled and told stories to myself in terms of how I responded to a particular student within the classroom environment discussed below.

The undercurrents of an inquiry into my inability to withstand a tension-filled moment and support the pre-service teacher of color in my class are “inquiry as stance” in practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith, 2003) and “relocating the personal to critical” in autoethnography. This approach allowed me to explore how my sociopolitical contexts have shaped my perspectives, behaviors, and decisions (Chang, 2008; Kamler, 2001). In her discussion on educating teacher educators by adopting “inquiry as stance,” Cochran-Smith (2003) contended that this approach offers “an intellectual as well as practical perspective on the education of teacher educators- a way of learning from and about the practice of teacher education by engaging in systematic inquiry on that practice” (p. 8). Similarly, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) described inquiry as stance as “both social and political- that is, it involves

making problematic the current arrangements of schooling; the ways knowledge is constructed, evaluated, and used; and teachers' individual and collective roles in bringing about change" (p. 289). In my own inquiry, I draw on the "inquiry as stance" within autoethnography to learn about and learn from my own teaching practice. I am particularly concerned with my unanticipated inability to support the student of color in an actual pedagogical setting, even though, as a teacher educator of color, I am fully committed to educational equity for all students. In so doing, I hope to deconstruct my own unconscious and taken-for-granted ways of thinking and acting that are embedded in social and political contexts, which reinforces what I am committed to work against in the cost of comforting and being validated by my predominantly white students. I also draw on Kamler's (2001) notion of relocating the "personal to critical" and putting the social and critical back into my personal practices of failure forces in pedagogy which share the similar commitment in attending to social and political in the notion of "inquiry as stance" (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Along with the understanding of the internalization of racial domination as social process, autoethnography and "inquiry as stance"—in which I move from personal to critical—provide a set of lenses through which to examine how white supremacist thinking seeps into the pedagogical practices that are meant to combat it.

Theoretical Framework: White Racial Supremacy

bell hooks (2013) argued that the US is founded on white supremacist thought and action, and "the bottom line of race and racism is white supremacy" (p. 153). According to hooks (2013), white supremacist thinking informs the consciousness of everyone regardless of skin color. In the author's view, this phenomenon is so difficult to recognize and challenge because white supremacist thinking functions unconsciously. hooks' contention aligns well with Spivak's (2003) aforementioned argument on the necessity of being hyper-reflexive about one's own complicity to the system of white domination even as a scholar of color. Additionally, Leonardo (2004, 2009) contended that racial domination that is historical and institutional is recreated at the individual level through white racial supremacy without one necessarily being aware of the manifestation of white racial supremacy forces. Similarly, Delgado and Stefancic (1997) described white supremacy as the operation of the forces that currently occupy the everyday mundane actions that shape the world in the interests of white people. In this regard, hooks (2013) noted that "thinking about white supremacy as the foundation of race and racism is crucial" (p. 6) because it explores how white

supremacist thinking in everyday life upholds and maintains a culture of domination.

I draw upon the notion of white racial supremacy to examine how I unintentionally support the system of white domination, as I am unable to successfully support a pre-service teacher of color in a tension-filled moment. This stance is useful, as it exposes the social fact that I, too, as a teacher educator of color, am inevitably shaped by the system of domination and have internalized the white supremacist thinking and acting. In his discussion about what comfort tells us about racism, Shi (2015) referred to his discomfort with his parents speaking Cantonese in public, which he ascribed to his preoccupation with the white people around them feeling uncomfortable. Shi went on to hypothesize what such (dis)comfort says about the state of internalized white supremacy in ourselves and others. In this work, through an inquiry into my personal pedagogical practice, I theorize about my inability to respond to a tension-filled moment in an undergraduate teacher education class, which occurred during a discussion on ethnic and racial stereotypes. Given that I unconsciously sought validation from my white students, in the sections that follow, I examine the social and racial limitations imposed on me as a teacher educator of color by recognizing the important social and psychological manifestations of white racial supremacy in my own classrooms. I also discuss the potentials of adopting "inquiry as stance" and going from "personal to critical" work that can ultimately impact the "pedagogical practice" and expose the privileged positions of whites.

Double Consciousness: W.E. B. Dubois

As mentioned above, the experiences of people of color are definitely not the same as those of whites. Inquiring into my pedagogical practice through the theoretical lens of "double consciousness" (Dubois, 1903/1994) helps to explain the psychological tension and conflicts within myself as an educator of color, as I am faced with a dilemma of deciding to support or silence a student of color in a class filled with white students. In this context, the notion of white racial supremacy, along with "double consciousness," allows me to acknowledge that I too am inevitably implicated in the system of domination. Dubois (1903/1994) described the Black experience of double consciousness as follows:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others. . . . One ever feels his twoness, -an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strings; two warring ideals on one dark body. . . . The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, -this longing . . . to merge his

double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for American has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro souls in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. (p. 3)

Dubois (1903/1994) introduced the notion of multiple, complex, and conflicting identities of the blacks who measure themselves and their capacity by the perceptions that white people have of them. The author also discussed the core beliefs that blacks hold about themselves in relation to white people. In other words, despite the desire to sustain their identities as Africans, according to Dubois, the blacks tend to have low self-esteem and feel inadequate because of how whites view them. Several scholars have noted that “double consciousness” continues to be a prevalent factor in the lives of African Americans and people from historically marginalized racial groups in general (e.g., Kumasi, 2012; Lyubansky & Eidelson, 2005).

Dubois’s (1903/1994) concept of “double consciousness” and the concept of white racial supremacy (hooks, 2013; Leonardo (2004, 2009) allow exposing educators from historically marginalized racial groups, not only educators from dominant group, as being implicated in reproducing dominant ways of knowing. However, Dubois’s (1903/1994) concept of two-ness, which he used to describe the experiences of African Diaspora in the history of slavery, provides an insight into doubly divided psychological effects of racism and domination. While the members of oppressed racial groups have unique perspectives about the system of domination not visible to the members of the dominant group, they also examine themselves through the gaze of the dominant other. Using *double consciousness* as a theoretical lens for the self-inquiry in this study shows that the actions and thinking of educators of color to those of white educators are not conflated in this paper, while demonstrating the powerful endurance of the dominant forces.

In her study, Willis (1995) examined the literacy experiences of a young African male third-grade student. In this work, employing Dubois’s (1903/1994) concept of “double consciousness” allowed Willis to illuminate the social and psychological effects of the system of domination on the way this student maneuvered the world of literacy through the dominant ways of knowing, which rendered his own cultural practices illegitimate. Willis (1995) suggested that literacy educators must attend to double personhood of students from historically marginalized group as a resource in school literacy practice to broaden the scope of literacy practice beyond “a Eurocentric literacy canyon” (p. 37). Carter and Kumasi (2011) also used

Dubois’s (1903/1994) concept of “double consciousness” to examine how some black youth interact and negotiate their identities during the book club activities and discussions. They concluded that using Dubois’s (1903/1994) notion of “double consciousness” as a lens helped them to “re-search” and “re-see” (Cartner & Kumasi, 2011, p. 88) the black youth’s sense making of the book discussed and their identities as they navigate dominant white and Afro-cultural ways of knowing. In this study, by using Dubois’s (1903/1994) notion of “double consciousness,” I hope to explore the impacting psychological manifestation of “double consciousness” in my own classroom as a teacher educator working mostly with white pre-service teachers. My goal is also to understand how my experience as a minority teacher educator is mediated by how I am perceived by my white students.

Context

The context of this inquiry is a small university town located in a Midwestern rural state in the US. The university in which this inquiry is situated is the only four-year university in the state. The state and university are both predominantly populated by whites. However, due to employment opportunities, the state has gradually become more diverse, especially in its public school student population.

The teacher educator in this inquiry is a female Asian American whose parents immigrated to the US forty years ago. I have been teaching at the university for six years now. As a minority woman teacher educator who is committed to working with pre-service teachers in better preparing them to support all their future students in becoming successful, I teach multicultural/diversity teacher education courses in which one of the main goal is to work against racism, especially racialized thinking and teaching. The course in focus of this inquiry is the undergraduate course titled Diversity and the Politics of Schooling, which is a required course for all students in the teacher education program at the university. The course content covers a wide range of pertinent topics such as race, racism, white privilege, white supremacy, marginalization, and structural inequality.

Discussion about Ethnic and Racial Stereotypes

One major pedagogical approach I adopt in the course is the notion of “difficult dialogue” (hooks, 1994), referring to a dialogue used to “disrupt the seemingly fixed (yet often unstated) assumptions” (p. 130). I employ this practice when exploring the invisibility of whiteness and deconstructing whiteness in order to begin the work of engaging students’ own relationship to race

and racism. Given that majority of students who are enrolled in the Diversity and the Politics of Schooling course are sophomores who have had very little experience and direct contact with ethnic and racial diversity, discussing and recognizing ethnic and racial stereotypes becomes the starting point for initiating “difficult dialogue.” According to Peng (2010), stereotypes are “the tendency to categorize individuals or groups according to an oversimplified standardized image and attribute certain characteristics to all members of the group” (p. 255), and they do not accurately portray individuals and their history. Thus, as Peng argued, stereotypes can impede the effectiveness of intercultural communication. Hughes and Baldwin (2002) posited that being aware of racial stereotypes is the first necessary step in working against them. The authors further observed that stereotypes are one of the major “stumbling blocks in effective communication” (p. 125) among people from different cultures and race.

As I am aware of the importance of recognizing different ethnic and racial stereotypes and bringing them to students’ awareness in order to work against them (Hughes & Baldwin, 2002), in the diversity class mentioned above, we discuss different ethnic and racial stereotypes. During this exercise, students are divided into groups of four or five to talk about different racial stereotypes. As we begin the activity, I call out different ethnic/racial groups and ask the students to write down whatever stereotypes associated with each group come immediately to their minds. I emphasize that suggesting these stereotypes does not necessarily imply that they personally perceive each ethnic/racial group in the same way, but simply reflects the general societal perceptions of each group.

When prompted to list the prevalent stereotypes associated with Latinos/Latinas, African Americans, Asians, and people from the Middle Eastern countries, students start giggling as they write their responses. When I ask them what they are giggling about, they say that they giggle because these stereotypes, while sounding terrible, are not very difficult to identify. For me as an educator, these

confessions indicate that this activity is an effective entry point to “difficult dialogue.” I try to convey that stereotypes that are not personal are easy to identify because they are a part of culture and circulate within the system of racial domination. Once the small group activity is completed, I initiate a whole class discussion, as a part of which we generate the same list of prevalent stereotypes. Below is an example of a partial list the class generates before discussing the circulation of stereotypes in media, society, and minds of individuals, along with their impacts on the members of the targeted groups.

The Swirl of Tension

One semester a year ago, as the class was finishing the aforementioned stereotypes list and I was about to move onto the discussion and start deconstructing the activity, a student from a Middle Eastern country raised her hand. She expressed that, while she recognizes the importance of the activity, partaking in it is extremely painful for her. As soon as the student expressed her feelings, I could feel the tension in the room, as the class became completely silent. I noticed that some students rolled their eyes, and I felt a huge knot in my stomach. After a few seconds that felt like an hour, I tried to explain that these stereotypes are not directed at her, but are rather the false perceptions of different ethnic/racial groups members of our society have. Thus, we need to recognize them as stereotypes rather than facts. The student courageously continued, stating that, given that she experiences the effects of these stereotypes every day, hearing them reinforced in the class is painful. In another silent moment that followed the student’s comment, I found myself uncomfortably confronting my own inability to support this brave pre-service teacher of color. Finally, another female student spoke up, saying that she experienced racism toward her as a white woman when she travelled to Mexico the previous year, but she did not let it bother her. A few seconds later, which we spent in total silence, this courageous Middle Eastern student bravely

Table 1
Stereotypes Described by Students

Latinos/Latinas	Africans Americans	Asians	Middle Easterners
Undocumented	Athletes	Math Geniuses	Terrorists
Low Riders	Loud	Bad Drivers	Womanizers
Dirty	Love Fried Chicken and Watermelon	Bad English	Belly Dancers
Gangs	Gangs	Bad Athletes	Violent

responded that experiencing Mexican person's racism while on holiday cannot be equated to the life of racial minorities in the US, for whom such issues are part of everyday experiences. This time, as she was sharing her thoughts and feelings, the student started crying. As I was standing in front of the class, facing my students, all of whom were white with the exception of the brave Middle Eastern young lady, I did not know how to respond to her. My heart went out to her, and I felt the need to support her. At the same time, I was deeply torn and conflicted. Saying anything against racial stereotypes felt risky and even dangerous. Yet, I sensed that some of the class members wanted me to support the white student who shared her experience of racism in Mexico. I was glad when the class time came to an end. Before she left, I asked the Middle Eastern student to come and see me the next day during my office hours. As the students were leaving the classroom, I heard one whispering to her friend < "Isn't someone being sensitive or what! Maybe it's that time of the month for her." The stereotypes activity that was meant to facilitate "difficult dialogue" for my students thus became extremely "difficult dialogue" for me as a teacher educator of color.

Inquiry as Stance and Moving from Personal to Critical

Inquiring about the reasons behind my inability to support the student of color who courageously shared her felt pain during the activity, as a part of which the class was instructed to create a list of ethnic and racial stereotypes, was more difficult to confront than supporting others in confronting their own racism. Perhaps I found this challenging because, as a teacher educator of color, I had assumed that I had what it takes to help students to work against their prejudiced thoughts. Perhaps I thought that I had enough personal experiences and academic knowledge to know better and teach better. As I inquire into what I see as failed pedagogical practices through the notion of white racial supremacy, I remember looking at the faces of twenty-four white students and not wanting to be ostracized from the group. While I felt the obligation and commitment toward the only non-white student—the student from a Middle Eastern country who was willing to speak up for her own rights and express her feelings—I was unwittingly compromising my integrity of being a teacher educator committed to social justice in order to be perceived favorably by the majority students. In this uncomfortable moment, my experience was mediated by my concern about how I would be perceived by my white students. The workings of the internalized forces of white racial supremacy within me in the given moment prompted

me to privilege saving the relationships with my white students in the classroom over supporting one student of color. In transitioning from the personal to the social and critical, white racial supremacy and "double consciousness" helped expose the fact that I too am a part of system of domination. Hence, I must inquire about my own pedagogical practices from within (as opposed from outside) the larger structure that is already predefined by racial hierarchies. I felt the "two-ness" within myself, as I was empathizing with the student from a Middle Eastern country while at the same time wanting to be a part of the majority and be favorably perceived by my white students. As this student shared her thoughts, I was so deeply torn, as I felt a strange desire to be validated by my white students. The notion of "double consciousness" allows me to examine how the forces of racial domination are deeply and durably ingrained in people, as even a teacher educator of color committed to support all students can unwittingly alienate the students of color, as I have done in my own teacher education classroom. Hence, the mechanism of internalized racial oppression contributes to the system of white supremacy.

During My Office Hours and After

When the Middle Eastern student came to visit me the next day, I was nervous and embarrassed. When I asked her what hurt her most and what made her cry during our previous class, she said, "It was not so much what they said, but how they said it, and how easy it was for them to just say them so lightly." After a long pause, I thanked her for her courage to speak up in the class. She responded, "Sometimes you just have say it, you know, whether or not others want to hear what you have to say." I felt very small in front of her as she made her case with grace and power, without a hint of anger in her voice.

In the following class, I began the lecture by opening up what had happened during our previous session. I asked the students to think about the labels that they live with in their daily lives and how those labels affect them. I also prompted them to consider how hearing others talk about those labels as if it were no big deal would make them feel. The class was silent again, and I did not insist on discussing this issue further. However, at the end of the semester, at least half dozen students stated that they were glad that we had a further discussion on the stereotypes activity and that they would not forget that day. It has been over a year since the incident, but I have frequently thought about what the student from a Middle Eastern country said to me when she visited me during my office hours. At the time, even though I felt very small in this student's presence, I was grateful to her, for her actions prompted me to dwell on

my limitations as a teacher educator of color that are largely imposed on me socially and politically. This student made me realize that recognizing such limitations is important pedagogically.

Discussion and Implications

Discussions on the internalization of white supremacy and racism are often regarded as a taboo, because such research runs the risk of being misinterpreted as reflecting weakness of the oppressed (Pyke, 2010). In this study, I have adopted practitioner inquiry and autoethnography, whereby I aimed to move from “personal” to “social and critical” through the conceptual lenses of “white racial supremacy” and “double consciousness.” In so doing, my goal was to explore my inability to successfully navigate the dilemma between serving my own internalized desire and tendency and supporting the only student of color in my class. I recognize that this inquiry is unique to my own personal experiences and it focuses on a single event that took place in one class; thus, the experience itself cannot be generalized. However, the dynamics of such inability and dilemma during “difficult dialogue” do suggest a few important implications for the field of teacher education and beyond as it highlights the dilemma that non-European educators inevitably faces with systematic and entrenched marginalization in one’s own classrooms.

First, as teacher educators of color, we should not shy away from implicating ourselves in the critiques and investigations of how the system of racial dominations is secured in our pedagogical practices by situating our individual practices socially and critically. Therefore, as shown in my own personal pedagogical example discussed in this inquiry, assuming that teacher educators of color committed to social justice education and racial equality stand outside of the system of domination and are immune to white racial supremacist thinking/acting is problematic because doing so conceals the circulation of white racial supremacy and derails the potentials of “difficult dialogue” where taken-for-granted views can be disrupted. The fact that I was unable to respond to one student of color in adequate ways suggests that the pedagogical practices of teacher educators of color are inevitably racially and politically loaded (Spivak, 2003). The issue is that educators of color can marginalize those students of color we are committed to support and inspire; therefore, teacher educators of color can contribute to lack of institutional support that is already problematic for students of color. My own failure in the pedagogical example used in this study exemplifies the internalized consequence of oppression and racism that, if gone unnoticed, can only perpetuate existing white racial supremacy. Sharp (2003) stated that engaging in

self-reflection and thinking deeply about her cultural and racial identity has allowed her to become more cognizant of her own thoughts and has enabled her to assist her students’ (of color) learning. I believe that self-reflection on cultural and racial identity of teacher educators of color is equally necessary.

Another significant contribution this inquiry offers stems from the revelation that students of color do have very different perspectives and insights from white students. Thus, they can offer important lessons not only to their peers, but also to all teacher educators (Johnston-Parson, Lee, & Thomas, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Moving one’s pedagogical practices that may on the surface seem personal to social and critical and listening to all students’ voices may result in positive changes in teacher educators’ pedagogical practices. In my case, one student of color and her courageous assertion in the class as well as during my meeting with her, served as a significant impetus for me to look more deeply into how internalized white racial supremacy manifests in my everyday pedagogical practices.

Moreover, although whether or not racial minority teacher educators can ever entirely overcome internalized white racial supremacy is debatable, concerted efforts and sustained steps must be taken to critically examine the actions and thoughts resulting from internalized racism. These issues must also be more systemically addressed in teacher education. Naming discriminatory pedagogical practices and actions within oneself for what they are requires internal conscious effort because the internalized racism cannot be overcome if one fails to recognize it. Overcoming internalized racism then also means that educators of color must not be seduced by what is comfortable, but rather pay close attention to the dilemmas and conflicted-ness akin to those I have experienced in the class I have discussed in this study.

At a broader level, internalized racism is emblematic of pervasiveness of racism in society, and it is essential for all races and individuals in various disciplines to fully understand how racial, political, and historical contexts in which we exist touch, influence and shape our values, beliefs, and actions. In my case, the internalized racism played out in my own classroom undermining a minority student’s position while simultaneously valuing the dominant culture. Without understanding and reflecting the effects of internalized racism, not only can individuals not strive to fight against oppression, but we cannot have positive impacts on social change.

With that in mind, I conclude this essay by invoking Said’s (1994) distinction between “maintainers” and “public intellectuals.” According to Said (1994), “maintainers” collude with the system of domination and uphold the status quo. They work hard to protect their own social and economic capital while

shying away from conflict and risk. In contrast, “public intellectuals” are scholar dissidents who know that power and knowledge are closely linked. They are willing to raise embarrassing questions in order to expose hidden truths and the contingency of received ideas. As Said (1994) so aptly put it, “They are not easily co-opted by institutions. They oppose the ruling class and the intractability of its power” (p. 11). In other words, “public intellectuals” are constantly engaged in creating disruption—within themselves, in society, and in the world. When teacher educators of color recognize the social and political limitations imposed on us as described above, this will allow us to assume the position of “public intellectuals,” which will better prepare us to facilitate “difficult dialogue” and navigate dissidences in diversity education classroom settings. In the diverse, globalized, fast, capitalist but still neocolonial world of the early 21st century, the need for “public intellectuals,” especially in pedagogical settings, seems more desperate than ever. To do so, all educators at all levels must more systematically engage in self-reflection around race because, through the process of critical self-reflection around race, individuals come to realize how they are situated in society, recognize the dynamics of oppression, and question the consequences of their beliefs and behaviors in classrooms (Milner, 2005, 2010). Without such an effort in questioning and interrupting educators’ own marginalization, a system of schooling becomes a site where racial domination is perpetuated (Dei, 1996).

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