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Crossing borders: At the nexus of critical service learning, literacy, and social justice

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> If education cannot do everything, it can achieve something in contributing towards the transformation of the world, giving rise to a world that is rounder, less angular, more humane. (Freire, 'A Dialogue', as cited in Giroux, 1996, p. 76)

Introduction

Canada, one of the most multicultural countries in the world, continues to struggle over issues of racism and discrimination. Although debate and controversy surrounds the definition of the term racism (Berman & Paradies, 2010), it is generally accepted that earlier definitions of racism included the belief that there exist discrete human races that are hierarchically ordered (Gillborn, 2008). However, Essed (1990) and others state that a subtler understanding of the term combines prejudice and power so that it is understood to be "the definitive attribution of inferiority to a particular racial/ethnic group and the use of this principle to propagate and justify the unequal treatment of this group" (p. 11). Institutional or systemic racism, on the other hand, is a subtler form of racism which operates regardless of people's conscious intentions and has been used to draw attention to the ways in which society is "saturated with assumptions and practices that have the routine effect of privileging white people over minorities" (Gillborn, 2008, p. 3). In Canada, individuals from minoritised groups are not only subjugated to individual instances of racism and discrimination, but also institutional racism continues to thwart their integration, progress and upward mobility in Canadian society (Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004; Henry & Tator, 2005; Lund, 2006).

In 2005, the Right Honourable Prime Minister of Canada, Paul Martin, stated that the government of Canada had made a "commitment to be a steadfast advocate of inclusion and to strengthen Canada's ability to combat racism" (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. ii). However, Canadian public K-12 school systems and higher institutions of education continue to attract large numbers of white, monolingual female teacher education candidates for classrooms in which there are a high number of students from 'other than white' racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Very few schools or faculties of education tailor their pre-service teacher education programmes to include issues that explicitly deal with racism, oppression, and bias. In particular, the

dominant white group rarely takes up issues of racism in teacher education and when they do, discussions tend to focus on both localised incidences of who experiences racism (Schick & St. Denis, 2005) and essentialist views of minoritised groups. This has been recognised as insufficient because racial discourses also need to include "the impact on those who perpetuate it" (Morrison, 1993, p. 11). An inclusion of discourses and narratives of privilege, racism, discrimination, representation and identity in both education and in society at large may provide ways to disrupt deficit theorising, a practice in which educators, school administrators and mainstream society attribute minoritised students' academic underachievement solely to students' backgrounds—their families, their cultural practices and communities (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009).

Although various scholars have engaged their white students in discussions of power, whiteness and privilege (Marx & Pennington, 2003) and may have provided consciousness-raising opportunities among pre-service teacher candidates, these discussions do not necessarily provide them with the necessary skills in becoming risk takers when responding to systemic racism. Before discussing which skills these might be, it is important to understand what the dominant academic discourse is around Canadian Aboriginal students' educational achievement.

Academic discourse around Canadian Aboriginal student achievement

In 1988 the Royal Commission of Canada passed the Multiculturalism Act, which intended that all ethnic groups be an integral part of Canada and be entitled to participate as members of society, regardless of racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious background (Tierney, 2007). However, this policy did not eliminate racist attitudes or lead to the equitable distribution of resources. For Canadian Aboriginal students, racism and discrimination in educational institutions still exists today. In Canada, the term Aboriginal refers to three groups of peoples: First Nations (FN), Métis (i.e., people of mixed white and First Nations ancestry) and Inuit. For the purposes of this paper, I use the term Aboriginal and First Nations interchangeably.

In the large urban city in the Canadian prairies that provides the context for this study, few pre-service teacher candidates from dominant groups have experienced any interaction with people outside their community and in fact have very little to do with those that have been historically 'Othered' and marginalised. Not only do they start the teacher education programme with various conceptions, biases, and stereotypical views of the other but also, unless work is done during the programme to change these biases, these views will be taken into the classroom and act as barriers to successful engagement with pupils from minoritised communities. However, educational institutions continue to reflect the experiences of the majority group (Banks & Banks, 2003), promoting narrow, idealistic and exoticised renditions of culture rather than focusing on "broader material and structural concerns" (May, 2003).

Aboriginal students are the most disadvantaged in Canada's education institutions, and the academic achievement gap between them and mainstream school-aged children has consistently been documented from a deficit perspective where students, parents, and First Nations' communities are seen as being responsible for this anomaly (Riecken, Tanaka, & Scott, 2006). The under-representation of Aboriginal teachers, the assimilative and integrative ethnocentric curricula in both higher education and K-12 systems of education, the minimum requirements of inter-cultural education, and deficit

notions of the First Nations people of Canada continue to plague their own attempts at being successful in the academic milieu. Rather than integrating Aboriginal knowledge, additive or tokenistic attempts at being inclusive have led to multicultural education practices for students of First Nations descent that are reductionist and essentialist; for example, celebrating cultural holidays, erecting teepees on school lawns, and occasionally using storytelling and storybooks by First Nations authors are seen to be inclusive practices. To compound this, institutions of higher education that align themselves with wider hegemonic social forces and faculties of education that do not adequately prepare white teacher candidates from mainstream backgrounds in exercises of conscientisation (Freire, 1973) and knowledge of the oppressive forces of colonisation can arguably only graduate teachers who perpetuate mainstream ways of instruction with deficit notions of those who are seen as being different.

The Prairie province in which this study was conducted has a high number of people of First Nations descent who face multiple challenges as they strive to thrive in today's society. As one indicator, 70% of off-reserve First Nations and 56% of urban-based Métis scored below the benchmark considered to be the minimum for an individual to cope in a complex knowledge-based society (Cowan, 2008). These statistics indicate an urgent need for educators to (re)examine their own practices, materials, methodology, and attitudes if they are to better serve this population.

In an attempt to both counter hegemonic literacy pedagogy and reposition FN students' identities at the forefront of literacy instruction, the course titled 'Reading Diagnosis, Assessment and Instruction' (ERDG 425) was revised to create a literacy programme that included both broader definitions of literacy (New London Group, 1996) and culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002). As part of the course requirements, a critical service-based learning component, which integrates academic service to the community with a social justice orientation (Rosenberger, 2000), was included to provide both adolescent youth of FN descent additional experiences with curriculum literacy and pre-service teachers' with opportunities to engage in literacy instruction whilst simultaneously engaging in critical reflections on their own subjectivities and positionalities. This paper reports on what a group of teacher candidates learnt from their experiences in a critical service learning practicum, focusing on the findings from the first year of a larger critical ethnographic research project that is now in its sixth year.

Theoretical framework

The intersecting frameworks of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998), the New Literacy Studies and Freire's (1970) model of critical pedagogy informed this study. Each framework is discussed in turn, and I then show how these informed the revision of the pre-existing course content and the service learning practicum that were integral to the programme under investigation.

Critical Race Theory

Racism has provided a reference from which one views and understands representations of those that are different through a socially constructed concept that serves powerful political and economic interests. This constructing of the 'other' has been detrimental in placing obstacles to equal and legitimate opportunities for progress. In other words,

racism advantages some people and disadvantages others. Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001) focuses on issues of race and racism; in particular, it makes race visible and demonstrates how the law and public institutions characterise people of colour as being inferior (Tate, 1997).

Critical Race Theory not only recognises that race is endemic in society, it works to eliminate racial oppression, crosses epistemological borders, works to name and discuss the daily realities of racism and exposes how racism continues to privilege whites and disadvantage people of colour; it insists on critiquing liberalism, in particular arguing that social change cannot occur without radical change to existing institutional structures; it sees itself as being committed to social justice; and it legitimises and advantages the voices of people of colour by using storytelling "to integrate experiential knowledge drawn from a shared history as the 'the other' into critiques of dominant social orders" (Delgado, 1990; see also MacDonald, 2003). Stories, counter-stories, and narratives of marginalised participants are useful for changing mindsets, for building community, and for easing the minds of those who suffer (Delgado, 1990). Storytelling provides powerful counter-stories to those who make white educational privilege appear natural (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, CRT gathers lived experiences and provides the power to envision those not as yet lived. As such it is ideally suited as a lens through which to deal with the issues of discrimination and racism in education that the programme under investigation seeks to address.

New Literacy Studies

The reading course that I teach is an elective course available in the fourth year of the elementary programme. As an area of the curriculum, this is subject to issues of discrimination and racism mentioned above. Traditional approaches to literacy learning are based within cognitive psychology models of individual development where skills, knowledge and understanding of reading and writing are introduced in a decontextualised, linear and hierarchically ordered manner set within a carefully traced trajectory at age-specific development stages. In this view, literacy is seen as a discrete set of skills that is taught in similar ways across varying contexts. Once a set standard of achievement is established, these are normalised along a trajectory. However, children who struggle to achieve at the same rates are pathologised as being deficit, at risk and underachieving. Often these children come from particular social groups. Rather than being responsive to the knowledge and skills these children bring to the classroom and using these to inform instruction, teachers tend to focus on their perceived negative aspects of these experiences (Carrington & Luke, 2003). Problematic with this traditional approach is that it is associated with the 'normally developing' child and "white, middle-class norms become established as the desirable literacy experiences which all children should enjoy" (Larson & Marsh, 2010, p. 5). This autonomous model of literacy is seen as neutral and independent of social and historical contexts (Street, 1987). In other words, a norm developed by the white middle class is universalised as 'the' norm for all groups, no matter what their cultural background.

An alternative perspective developed in opposition to the autonomous model of literacy is one that Street (1987) identifies as the 'ideological' model of literacy. This view of literacy assumes that literacy is a social practice, historically situated, and cannot be understood apart from the social, historical, political, economic and cultural

contexts that it is enacted in. For Street (1995), literacy practice "refers to both behaviour and the social and cultural conceptualisations that give meaning to the uses of reading and/or writing" (p. 2). However, these practices are not necessarily observable units of behaviour as they "also involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships" (Street, 1993, p. 12) and are "located not only within cultural wholes but also within power structures" (Street, 1987, p. 49). Thus, it is what all people do with literacy within particular contexts and situations, in formal and informal settings. Kress (2003) argues that literacies are also multimodal social practices that provide particular affordances in particular domains where "the context is constituted by local, culturally specific practices that outline who has access to learning to read, and who writes which kind of texts for which purposes" (Larson & Marsh, 2010, p. 21). From this perspective, a multiplicity of social practices which have so far been marginalised become seen as legitimate and valuable ways of knowing and being in the world.

Critical pedagogy

Critical Race Theory and New Literacy Studies have in common a focus on socio-political hegemonic practices created by white middle-class society. Freire's (1970) model draws on social, critical educational theory and cultural studies to examine the role of schools within the dominant society's socio-political and historical context. Freire opposed the banking model of school where students are seen as simply depositories for information. Schooling for him was envisioned as a space to empower students for both personal and social transformation by linking curriculum to the concrete lives of students. For Freire (1973), empowerment, a concept linked to the idea of power, was perceived as a means for liberating oppressed people. To become empowered, the oppressed had to pass through three stages: conscientising, that is, learning about social inequities; inspiring others to feel confident about their efforts to achieve equity; and finally being liberated. Unlike Freire, feminist pedagogues argue that empowerment should include both individual conscientisation (power within) as well as the ability to work with others, thus collectively leading to more politicised power (Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2003). Although the term empowerment is linked to the idea of power, it is not seen as one having power over the other at the cost of the other but rather as collectively having the power to engage in social transformation. However, for social transformation to occur, critical thinking and critical understanding are required for finding one's voice and making sense of one's life respectively.

Critical pedagogy therefore provides a means from which to interrogate socio-historical and political spaces and to act upon hegemonic forces that marginalise and disenfranchise those not from mainstream populations. It is a philosophy of praxis that actively induces a dialogue that struggles with competing concepts of "how to live meaningfully in a world confronted by pain, suffering, and injustice" (McLaren & Hammer, 1989, p. 39). In other words, critical educators need to "develop a discourse that can be used to interrogate schools as ideological and material embodiments of a complex web of relations of culture and power, on the one hand, and as socially constructed sites of contestation actively involved in production of lived experiences on the other" (Giroux, 1985, p. 23). The implications for teachers who wish to move away from patriarchal education are; 1) to create a curriculum that brings the lives of students to the core; 2) to see the classroom space for 'problematising' students in the context in which they operate and attempting to make sense of the world and the relationships

between subjectivity and mainstream agendas (Giroux, 1985); and 3) for schools to interrogate the hidden curriculum by asking questions including Who benefits? Whose curriculum? Whose knowledge counts? Whose culture? Whose standard? (Wink, 2005). Thus, pedagogy is not seen as merely instructional practices but rather it includes the reality of the classroom at both the micro and macro level where interrogating instructional and assessment practices becomes a consciousness-raising exercise in the politics of education in mainstream society. At its core, critical pedagogy is about human liberation for social transformation, liberating both oppressor and oppressed from their positions, because without both being liberated social transformation would not be possible.

Critical service learning

Critical service learning can be seen as the social action part of critical pedagogy. It provides institutions with a legitimate basis for not only engaging in social action but also with opportunities to engage in a critique of the social action itself in relation to systems of power (Mitchell, 2008). This approach to social action and social justice goes further than traditional volunteer work and/or service learning in that it focuses unapologetically on inequitable distributions of power that are the root causes of the necessity for community service. Critical service learning asks the 'giver' to complicate both the understandings of power and the implicit nature of power of the giver to the receiver. For pre-service teacher education students, critical service learning provides them with possibilities for change within their future classrooms, learning how to use their voice, and to become reflective teachers about their roles and responsibilities as citizens in a democratic society.

The research context: Reading Diagnosis, Assessment and Instruction (ERDG 425)

This study began in the winter 2007 semester at a medium-sized university located in mid-western Canada. Historically, the Reading Diagnosis, Assessment and Instruction course was an elective 13-week course based on autonomous views of literacy learning and acquisition. The course was taught on campus, scheduled from 4:30–6:15 p.m., focused on an autonomous model of reading instruction and included a six-week, one-on-one tutoring experience with a struggling reader for 30–40 minutes twice a week during class time. However, I was interested in investigating whether a course that focused on social justice and was based on culturally responsive pedagogy, New Literacy Studies and critical pedagogy would have greater success in reaching students who had been historically marginalised. To this end, the timing of the course was moved to the morning, and the content revised to focus on culturally responsive literacy education that included a critical service learning (CSL) component off-site at LTAS, an alternative middle years school.

The participants

To situate myself in this study, I am a Canadian citizen who was born in Tanganyika (Tanzania after independence) to African parents of Indian descent who strongly affiliate with the Shia Nizari Ismaili Muslim faith. I immigrated to Canada as a teenager a few years after Tanzania came under a socialist government. I was educated in

Tanzania, Kenya, England and Canada and at the time of this study my previous tertiary experience included teaching Muslim females in Saudi Arabia, in-service teachers, and undergraduate and graduate teacher education students in Singapore, United States and Canada. I teach this course on a yearly basis at this institution. As a racialised, minoritised, marginalised, and visible scholar of colour, I consider myself an ally to those who have been categorised into similar group memberships. My instruction and research focuses on critical pedagogy with a focus on culturally responsive literacy education.

The other participants in this study consisted of 19 female teacher candidates, 17 who were fourth-year students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education programme and two who were in-service teachers working towards their certificate of inclusive education. Eighteen self-identified as white and monolingual (English) from either working class or middle socio-economic backgrounds; the other was of FN ancestry, from a working-class background and fluent in both English and Cree. While she was attending one of the two Urban Native Teacher Education Programmes in the province, four student teachers were registered in Middle Years Social Justice Education Programme, and 12 were from the Elementary Years Programme. Their ages ranged from 22 to 23.

Nineteen young urban adolescent students of FN ancestry enrolled in Grades 7, 8 and 9 who were identified by their home teachers as reading below grade level were selected for inclusion in the literacy learning centre. These students were identified as being from low socio-economic backgrounds and had attended several schools prior to attending Lemon Tree Alternative School (LTAS). Almost all either lived with a single parent, in foster homes, group homes or in institutionalized settings. Three of the male participants were active gang members. I was invited by one of the teachers, principal, parents and the board members of LTAS to work with the teacher and students (Pirbhai-Illich, 2010). A research proposal was written, approved by the board of directors of LTAS and the Elder, and consequently research ethics was obtained from the university. The staff members were invited to sign consent forms as were the students' parents and/or caregivers, teachers, students and the teacher candidates with the understanding that they could choose to leave the study at any time and that they would have access to the final results. The educational institutions and all participants who took part in this study were provided with pseudonyms.

The research site

This study took place at LTAS, situated in a middle-class neighbourhood in a city of approximately 230,000, in which the predominant population is of Caucasian descent. Established in 1972, LTAS is part of a private, non-profit organisation where students are referred from mainstream schools and social services because of irregular attendance, behavioural problems, unstable family and home environments, involvement with youth courts, drug or alcohol related problems, recent release from judicial institutions, physical or sexual abuse, or issues related to poverty. Students identified as 'problematic' in mainstream schools in the city are either 'pushed' into or independently enrol at LTAS for a 'remedial' programme.

The main objective of LTAS is to provide students with educational and social skills to re-enter mainstream schools. However, because the majority of the students at the school are of Aboriginal ancestry, the school staff works within a holistic framework

where students' physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs are addressed. The school serves adolescent youth aged 12–16, enrolled in grades 7–9, of whom 85–90% are from Aboriginal descent. At the time of this study, a maximum of 12 students were registered at each grade level.

Methods, data sources and collection

Since this study focused on understanding teacher candidates processes of 1) deconstructing white privilege and stereotypes, 2) shifting from autonomous to ideological models for literacy, and 3) working with culturally responsive pedagogy using critical service learning as a mediating tool, an ethnographic case study was used for this investigation. Case studies provide a lens from which to explore over time a bounded system and/or multiple cases to obtain insight about a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). As principal researcher, I took on the role of participant observer in planning, designing and implementing a culturally responsive literacy programme involving the major six areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing that embody the English Language Arts Curriculum in this mid-western province. Following in the tradition of CRT, where "the recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of colour" (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993, p. 6) and 'voice' validates the utilisation of personal narratives and stories as evidence to document inequity and discrimination (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005), I kept a daily journal of all my reflections and observations of the teacher education students' interactions with the adolescent student participants. Several sources of data were used for analysis and reflection for this particular study including pre-service teachers' a) assignments; b) Web CT discussion forums; c) in-class free-writes; d) class discussions; e) homework assignments, and f) final course reflections. With the exception of the class discussions where researcher logs were kept, all the other data were elements of portfolio assessment. The final course reflection included a component where the teachers were asked to critically reflect on the learning process and experiences. Interviews with mainstream classroom teachers, the parents, school-aged children and those who worked (both teachers and administrators) at LTAS were tape-recorded and transcribed by my research assistant. The classroom teacher, parents, school staff and students verified all transcribed data.

As I conceptualised and engaged in the deconstruction, construction, and reconstruction of the ERDG 425 course, I also include my reflexivity as a researcher and the pre- and in-service teachers' experiences. Both Professor Theresa Austin from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (my critical friend and co-researcher in the following years) and I reviewed the data from the various sources, searched for themes independently, and served to confirm these by comparing our findings. Using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we analysed the data to arrive at major patterned practices. Finally, we collated our findings, debated our sense making of the data and settled on the themes that emerged.

Findings

Conscientization: Entering third space

Using my understandings of social justice, critical pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy, I selected the course content to include texts on white privilege (McIntosh, 1989), the impact of colonialism (Battiste, 1998), cross-cultural teaching (Piquemal, 2004), social justice (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007), critical literacy (Comber & Simpson, 2001; Luke & Freebody, 1997), culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002), visual literacy (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), multiliteracies (Anstey & Bull, 2006), student engagement and alternative education (Portelli, Shields, & Vibert, 2007), text types/genres (Derewianka, 2002), and the four resource model (Luke & Freebody, 1991). Instructing a literacy instruction and assessment course that was contrary to current practices of mainstream teachers and the provincial curriculum language and literacy guidelines created tensions between my teacher candidates and me. They wanted to know how to teach the way they had been shown during their internship programme while I was using backwards design (Wiggins & McTighe, 1999) and project work.

As we navigated through this unfamiliar, complicated and sensitive terrain, at all times I was conscious of the unique, situated, contradictory and dynamic nature of my identity and the multiple lenses that I used to view the world. Unlike all but one of my teacher candidates, I was aware of my ability to navigate back and forth between the cultures of minoritised groups and that of the dominant mainstream, what Dubois (1973) names as 'double consciousness.' However, I also understood that like my teacher candidates, hegemonic narratives that I have taken on as part of my own identity often also distort my interpretation of the world.

Our in-class discussions provided us ways in which to interrogate previously unexamined, unacknowledged, invisible and murky spaces between both the explicit and the implicit manifestations of institutional racism in Canadian society, and in particular educational institutions, and how autonomous models of literacy failed to deliver equitable opportunities for those from minoritised groups. Although this part of the course aimed at naming, troubling and addressing these issues, the point of these exercises was also to create a safe third space for " elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2); to take on the challenge of understanding our identities, ideologies, history, power, and our influences in the way society has been shaped and is continually being shaped, and to use this knowledge to create a socially just literacy programme.

Simultaneously, the teacher candidates were preparing to meet with their tutees at LTAS and getting to understand the various contexts that their students moved in and out of; that of family, home, and community. Inevitably, struggles and tensions in our classroom began to emerge. In the following, I present several texts from the teacher candidates' early in-class free write assignments and reflections after our discussions on deficit theorising, white privilege, multiliteracies and from their initial meetings with their student at LTAS. However, to start, I present a telephone message from L, a 23 year-old female teacher candidate after she had met her student.

> I'm the one from your … I'm sure you remember me—but I'm the one
> from your [daytime class] of E Reading. And, um, I'm the one who has
> been … I was placed with Tony today. And I just need to talk to you
> further about the situation because, um, … now that I had some time to
> think about it and I think after the first meeting I was kinda in initial
> shock in thinking that I could do it and that I could deal with some of the
> things he was talking about, but at this point I just feel absolutely sick
> about the situation and I'm absolutely not comfortable working with
> him. And, um … because at this point even seeing some of his interests
> and that his interests are in rap and then I researched further some of the
> rappers he was showing me, and even the local rappers, and they are all
> with gangs and stuff like that. And I just … and it's absolutely too far for
> my comfort level … see if there is something else we can work out
> because I just don't really feel good about this situation right now.

This message clearly indicates that L is fearful, fearful of the unknown, of the
counter-culture and of 'Other'. L, a young white female living at home with her parents,
with no experience of interaction with children of First Nations descent, has already
constructed negative stereotypes. L was not alone in her fear but she was the only
student who openly voiced her concerns to me. She left two other messages on the same
day, reiterating her position, and using her mother (who is an educator) to inform me
that L was only planning to teach mostly white kids in mainstream schools. Several
other students were also concerned and needed reassurance from the principal, the Elder
and me. The media in North America continues to portray the peoples of First Nations
descent as the exotic other (Said, 1978), in this case as being poor, uneducated, lazy,
alcoholics and violent. The prevalence of this perspective is seen in the educational
literature, educational and government institutions, television, newspapers and in areas
of private relationships. Organisations such as UNICEF and National Geographic are
also complicit in perpetuating the differences between the Western 'norm' and the
exotic 'Other'. This sort of cultural racism when presented constantly in the media not
only creates xenophobia but also becomes an accepted norm from which identities are
reaffirmed and recreated. After her first encounter with her student, another teacher
candidate, B, writes:

> First of all I believe one has to look at why there is such a high
> population of aboriginal youth in these alternative schools. Many would
> be quick to say that '**these**' [emphasis in original] students have not yet
> caught on to how the school system operates. Others place blame on
> Residential schools and believe that is the root of the lack of parenting
> skills and all the behavioural and drug use problems among aboriginals.
> While I do believe that Residential schools certainly was detrimental
> towards the future generations of aboriginals, I will not go as far as to
> say this was the 'only' factor.

B is beginning to interrogate several issues that concern the Aboriginal population in
this province. She uses avoidance tactics in her language use such as " many would",
"others place" and "while I do believe" to distance herself from committing to a
response that may implicate her negatively. She also relegates the cause of the salient
issues to being the 'Aboriginals' problem, as she still struggles to navigate through the
concepts of racism and institutional racism. Her use of language at this stage,

demonstrates that she sees no difference between and within the Aboriginal peoples in Canada. However, she does take a stand in relation to the influence of residential schools, although with reservation. A few weeks later the same teacher candidate writes:

> I knew through those various sources that I was lucky and grateful to be in the majority, that I did not have to contend with the societal and structural pressures that our culture and people at large was and is pressing down upon minorities … I did not choose to be privileged or to be born in the white middle class just as they [referring to the students of Aboriginal descent at LTAS] did not choose to be in the situation that they are currently in, but what we do have control of is our future and our choices…. I hope they believe in themselves enough to know that they can do it, no matter what obstacles might be placed in front of them.

B continues to struggle in this third space; on the one hand she starts to recognise the ways in which white privilege has benefitted her and the existence of institutional racism and yet a few sentences later she contradicts herself by not being able to recognise that for racialised and marginalised groups, racism, discrimination, poverty and the lack of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) limit their access to success in mainstream societies. Teacher candidate LI's deficit theorising of students attending alternative education is somewhat more complicated; she believes that students' own families and communities are incapable of providing solutions and therefore they have to beg for help from outsiders; that is, the white population and that the 'good life' is what she sees as her lifestyle rather than theirs. The impossibility of a good life within Aboriginal paradigms is typical of the 'othering' processes (Said, 1978). LI writes:

> I think that the students attending alternative schools may have learning disorders or/and behaviour issues. They may be socially inept and lacking in the area of academics, simply because they had not been given proper care and attention in the past. I think the students may come from homes that do not necessarily stimulate their minds and their backgrounds involve at-risk behaviours. I think the students are begging to be helped and to be given a chance at a good life.

Several other teacher candidates also used over-generalised and essentialist notions of Aboriginal peoples and deficit theorising to explain the reasons for the high number of Aboriginal youth in alternative education. For example, N states: "It is obvious to me that the students at LTAS do not have what they need to survive mainstream schools or life outside the school. These students would benefit very much from life skills training (home economics, industrial arts, skills in the trades)", while D writes: "I know there are adaptive programs focusing on life skills and practical knowledge. It is a way to help those that struggle with school, build their knowledge in smaller classes so that they can function in the workplace or life in general". Yet another teacher candidate's views of families of FN descent include that "… a very good income is not present in these households because the parents aren't motivated enough to get a job … these students don't have a lot of role models in their lives or family members to look up to—their family does not support or believe in them."

Negative stereotypes of FN people that are entrenched in Canadian society include that they have an 'inherent' weakness and are lazy (Lund, 2006). The findings from

Steele's (1997) study indicated that racial stereotypes have been found to have a strong negative effect on students' academic achievement and that the mere introduction of stereotypes of ethnic groups disadvantages these groups academically. In 2010, findings from an in-depth face-to-face survey of 2,614 Indian, Metis and Inuit people living in 11 Canadian cities that was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research indicated that 70% of the participants reported that they had been personally discriminated against and 89% perceived that non-Aboriginal people have negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people. The out-dated genetic/cognitive racist assumptions and stereotypes that Aboriginal students are not capable of learning or achieving in academic areas is one reason why Aboriginal children are not achieving academically.

Critical service learning: Moving towards relational pedagogies

Critical service learning can contribute to teacher candidates' self-exploration of their identities, power and privilege. In the context of this study it also provided the teacher candidates an opportunity to engage in identity work at a socio-historical, political and professional level. Furthermore, moving away from an autonomous understanding of literacy to an ideological one, using culturally responsive education as a mediating tool, demanded that the teacher candidates learn to build relationships with historically marginalised students to meet their literacy needs.

Although most of the teacher candidates noted in their final reflections that they had gained personally and professionally from the authentic experience of working with the students at LTAS, some still struggled to see how Canada's colonial project and institutional racism created the need for institutions like LTAS and why we were moving those at the margins to the centre in literacy education. In the following, I present some of the teacher candidates' final reflections about their learning. In her reflection in the final portfolio assignment, BN describes:

> After this session and course I am still left with questions as a future educator. How can I engage students in a mainstream classroom? How do I prevent students from 'slipping through the cracks?' How do I make the curriculum more relevant to their lives, life curriculum? I still received many answers throughout this experience but there are still many remained unanswered, but I think this entire experience was so beneficial for my future career.… I have grown tremendously through this course and I feel I have learned so much more about social inequities and reading strategies.

BN's final reflection concentrated mostly on what she had personally learnt about culturally responsive literacy education and how she used the various literacy strategies with her student. In the above, she continues to focus on her professional development. Furthermore, BN notes that she is concerned about making culturally responsive literacy education relevant to students from mainstream backgrounds, indicating that she has as yet not made the transition to understanding that mainstream curricula is already culturally responsive for mainstream students. In the following, tentative understandings about institutional racism and critical pedagogy were beginning to emerge in LT's final portfolio reflection. LT had formed a trusting relationship with her student and she writes about her dissatisfaction with our limited time with the students, her student's perception about herself, her inherited privilege and interrogating our roles at the school.

> It was very rewarding working one on one with my student. However, I am somewhat concerned that because our tutoring ended so abruptly, the students may feel abandoned and discouraged. Layla grew to trust me and now I am gone … throughout the course, my ideas towards social justice issues were challenged and transformed. I engaged with asking the 'why', wrestling with the issues behind the lives of the students at LTAS. My eyes were opened to the injustices of our society, and how truly privileged I am.

Building relationships with the students and understanding their contexts enabled the teacher candidates to centre literacy instruction around the lived experiences of the students, thus bringing relevancy for the students. DW, another teacher candidate, describes how her relationship facilitated learning:

> In developing a relationship and working with my focal student, I saw first hand the value of differentiating practices to support the needs of the students, as well as the importance of constructing relevancy for students. I also understand more than ever about some of the societal and structural influences … and my role as an educator in helping to facilitate change. This course gave me the most valuable life experience in the context of my chosen career.

Almost all the teacher candidates wrote about relationships or building relationships with their students and how these facilitated or debilitated both instruction and learning. For example, SJ states that she initially found it difficult to connect with her student and that "there was distance at first but then a strong relationship developed" and that the relationship was what helped with engaging her student in literacy learning. Similarly, LT notes in the concluding paragraph of her portfolio reflection: "Working at LTAS was a whole new experience on its own. Learning about alternative schooling, working and building relationships in this unique environment has furthered my education in a way the university or a textbook could not do on its own." For both teacher candidates, teacher-student relationships were found to be fundamental to learning how to engage in dialogue within culturally responsive pedagogy.

Although service learning and volunteer work is becoming more common in teacher education, many of the institutions chosen for service learning or volunteer experiences tend to be relatively safe, sterile spaces where there are confluences between those from the centre and those relegated to the margins of society. The service learning component or volunteer work is just that—the powerful being charitable to the weak. Challenging these saviour discourses provide the means for interrogating power, privilege, discrimination, dominance and inequities across various intersectionalities of identity including race, gender, religion and socio-economic status.

Conclusion

The findings of this research project raise several implications for teacher education and in particular for literacy teacher education. Firstly, engaging in culturally responsive literacy teacher education means engaging in a political project. It is political because one needs to understand one's own subjectivity and positionality in relation to those who we teach: Who am I? How does who I am relate to society? How do I view myself and how am I viewed by others? How does this influence how we relate to each other?

It is also political because it requires questioning the status quo in literacy education, that is, whose and what knowledge counts? And who benefits? It is to know that knowledge is not neutral (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993) and to challenge and interrogate the socio-historical conditions that legitimate dominant literacy related approaches and to re-envision ways to move those who have been historically at the margins to the centre of learning. Moving away from an autonomous literacy model to an ideological one presented several challenges as teacher candidates struggled to unlearn how they were taught, how they learned to teach and how the school system expects them to teach.

Additionally, the data revealed that teacher candidates go through several stages as they process their understandings of their own social identities and affiliations in these group memberships. Disbelief, confusion, and conflicting narratives were the norm when we first started investigating how power and privilege influenced the ways in which people and society are constructed. Interestingly, unlike the other teacher candidates, B, who was still floating in 'third space' at the end of the course, continued to use discourses that both positioned herself as not being racist while still making racist comments. Ideological incongruence refers to "the dilemma experienced by individuals when their ideological or belief sets are incompatible" (Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005, p. 153). Problematic is that these are the individuals who may espouse anti-racism or a belief in culturally responsive pedagogy but may not enact it.

Deficit theorising about minoritised groups and in particular Aboriginal peoples continued for over half the course. Theorising about and deconstructing white privilege, power and systemic racism at the university did not seem real issues to the students. They took on the position of innocent onlookers (hooks, 1992), not understanding how macro-level discourses constructed their own subjectivities. In this regard it was the experiential dimension at LTAS and the critical deconstruction of the service-based learning and tutoring itself that shifted most of the teacher candidates' understandings.

The critical service learning provided students with opportunities to learn about, learn with and learn alongside their student. The teacher candidates came to understand that their negative stereotypes and deficit theorising about Aboriginal families and children were not in keeping with the reality in front of them. More importantly, they realised that they could not get their student to work with them before they established a trusting relationship. Recently, similar findings have emerged from other studies in New Zealand in relation to Māori students (Bishop, 2011). Teacher candidates who were not successful building a relationship with their student inevitably found that their student didn't show up for the tutoring session or that they disengaged from learning. Almost all students commented that their relationships with the students provided them with the knowledge to dialogically build a literacy programme for them.

My reading of the research in critical multicultural literature indicated that disrupting notions of white privilege and racism is difficult work for both teacher educators and learners. As I navigated through this first year of my ethnographic study I too struggled with conveying and deconstructing the messages that needed to be disrupted. In the first three weeks of our course, I was firm and used evidence-based research, historical texts and current affairs to substantiate my messages. This proved problematic as initially more than half the teacher candidates resisted engaging in our discussions while others continued to deficit theorise about the Canadian Aboriginal population and also about refugees and other recent immigrants. As a racialised, minoritised, marginalised, divorced, female visible scholar of colour, it was challenging

to hear and read some of the comments made about minoritised groups and to move forward in shifting the teacher candidates' perspectives about Canada's colonial legacies. Advice from my parents on how they navigated both institutional and individual incidents of racism, my own reflections of the self-protective layers I had built to traverse between the margins and center of mainstream societies partially informed me on how to move forward. More importantly, my upbringing within the ethics of humility, relationship of 'sisterhood' and critical community service embodied in my religious community provided me with the tools to work with and alongside the teacher candidates. Teaching difficult and troubling anti-racist discourses to white mainstream teacher candidates required a large degree of sensitivity, compassion and humility. Just as I am shocked when an individual labels me as a Muslim terrorist, ignorant and uneducated, I too realised that one cannot do real, lasting, meaningful collaborative social justice work 'in the face'. Additionally, just as I was trying to convince the teacher candidates about being culturally responsive to minoritised school-aged children, I too had to change my ways and become culturally responsive to my teacher candidates. This meant building relationships, getting to know more about them, being mindful and nurturing their sensitivities and insecurities and yet holding firm to the principles of anti-racist pedagogy. I found myself applying the approach my mother took in teaching me about life; that is, using gentleness and propelling the teacher candidates into the *safest* possible third space as they negotiated an oppositional ideological terrain to the one with which they were inculcated with their mother's milk. Although I wasn't able to reach all of the teacher candidates, with humility I was able to garner more willing allies to work with and alongside me to move the cause towards providing culturally responsive literacy pedagogy to those who have been historically marginalised.

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