This is not the *Urban* Cohort: A Performance Narrative in Four Acts

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Characters[1]

INSTRUCTOR: A WHITE WOMAN, TEACHER EDUCATOR, AND DOCTORAL CANDIDATE. She is using critical race theory as the primary theoretical framework for creating curriculum for a preservice literacy methods course.
KHALI: INSTRUCTOR's friend.
CASI LOVE: INSTRUCTOR's committee co-chair, mentor, and friend.
HANNA, KRISTA, HALEY, DEIDRE, MARGARET, EMILY, ANN, MARY BETH, BRITTANY, AMANDA, ALEXIS, BETH, SUMMER, NICOLE, MARIA, TIFFANY, AUDREY, KIMBER, AMY, MEGHAN, KAITLYN: White preservice teachers, junior undergraduate students enrolled in the literacy methods course INSTRUCTOR is teaching.
BRIANNA: an African American preservice teacher and junior undergraduate student enrolled in the literacy methods course.

Setting

A higher education literacy methods course for 27 university juniors majoring in early childhood education (22 of whose voices are represented in this performance narrative). The course is taught in the professional development room of Belle Vue Elementary, a school with a student population that is 99% African American, located in a predominantly African American neighborhood in close proximity to the center of a capital city in the southeastern United States. This course reflects a departure from most of the other sections of the early childhood literacy methods courses at this university because of the author's decision to foreground issues of race and racism in response to the widely documented finding that African American and Latino/a children continue to be failed by educational systems and educators (Boutte, 2007; Hollins, 2011; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Monroe, 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2011; Valdes, 2001. The early childhood program at this university had recently established an *urban cohort* of about 20-30 undergraduate, preservice teachers, whose entire early childhood program focused on the

complex issues facing urban communities. However, the students in the author's course were *not* part of that urban cohort. In the author's course, assignments included: (a) writing a racial memoir, (b) working with kindergarten literacy buddies and getting to know them in their homes and communities, (c) designing and implementing culturally relevant literacy lessons, (d) reading and discussing texts dealing with issues of race and racism, and (e) reflecting and responding via discussion board to a lecture in an African American symposium series. The only other courses in the undergraduate program that took this approach to focus on race and racism were those taught to a group of students who registered intentionally for the urban cohort, which focused on issues of equity in education.

This performance narrative was constructed using performance analysis (Denzin, 2003) as a way to synthesize and analyze data collected from a critical ethnographic (Madison, 2005) investigation of the *attitudes, dispositions, and beliefs* of the preservice teachers as the course foregrounded race and racism. The performance narrative represents verbatim data collected primarily through pre- and post-course racial attitudes questionnaires, supplemented with data from course assignment reflections, class conversations, field notes, reflective journals, and over 20 hours of audio-taped, three-part, in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2014).

Time

It is the spring of 2010, during the five-month term of a college semester which begins in January and ends in May. The course meets every Monday starting at 9:00 a.m.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I
Scene 1 ………… "I do not see color."
Scene 2 ………… "I treat all people the same."
ACT II
Scene 1 ………… "What about the White children?"
Scene 2 ………… "I'm not a racist person."
Scene 3 ………… "It's not developmentally appropriate to talk about race."
ACT III
Scene 1 ………… "Everyone sees color, you're lying if you say you don't."
ACT IV
Scene 1………… "I want them to love me but they don't."
Scene 2………… "This is not the urban cohort."

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ACT I
SCENE 1: "I DO NOT SEE COLOR."

INSTRUCTOR

How would you respond to the statement, "I do not see color?"

HANNA

I do not see color and I respect everyone regardless of their color. I see way past the color.

KRISTA

I would say every child is special and deserves to be treated as such. I do not look at a child's race to determine how I will teach them.

HALEY

I know, right, because we are all human and our lifestyles may be different but that's it.

DEIDRE

Well I know that I will see no color in my students! We are all people striving towards the same goals.

MARGARET

I agree with that. All children are beautiful in my eyes and I plan on giving them all the education that they deserve. Like the children here at Belle Vue, they're just so precious.

EMILY

Yeah, it's just like in the song "Black or White" by Michael Jackson. He is telling everyone that it doesn't matter whether you are Black or White; we are all people and should be treated the same way.

AUDREY

But when teachers try to say that they see every child as equal and every child is the same, this is taking away from that child's uniqueness. To ignore a child's ethnicity or cultural needs is depriving them of who they are.

BRIANNA

Of course you see color. Because I am African American, I can relate to my students here at Belle Vue better than I ever could at any other school where there weren't as many African American children. We can talk about hair, we can talk about skin, and I mean it's not just teaching about race, race is in everything I teach.

KIMBER

I agree with Audrey and Brianna. You just can't say "I don't see color!" Every student, like every teacher, is a different individual. You have to treat them differently if you want to hear their voices.

ACT I
SCENE 2: "I TREAT ALL PEOPLE THE SAME."

MARY BETH

But that doesn't make sense.   I always thought it was *wrong* to give special treatment to some children just because of their race.

NICOLE

I feel like there is no reason to treat students differently. They all deserve the same education and are capable of being great students.

DEIDRE

Yes, but depending on home life students may need more assistance or perhaps a review of last years' materials because they aren't receiving support at home.

AMANDA

There is no way for me to know but I believe if I was of another race and had the same parental support that I had growing up, the situation would be the same as it is today. I believe that more than social class, parental involvement, and encouragement are what allow children to succeed in school and in life.

INSTRUCTOR

So do you guys think that some parents just don't care about their students?

MARIA

Yes, some parents really couldn't care less about their children at all. It is really sad, but very true.

TIFFANY

And some parents did not purposely have their children and may resent them. And that is why they don't really read and write at school.

BETH

I feel that way about Zantavious, I really don't think he writes much at home. I can hardly get him to write a sentence when we work together at Belle Vue!

ANN

I feel that way about my buddy too. It just doesn't seem like Pierre reads or writes much at home either.

DEIDRE

Yeah, like with Emmit, I mean I can just tell there's not much reading and writing going on at home. I think his home may even be violent. That's why I am kind of afraid to do this home and community visit.

BRIANNA
(talking quietly to AMY)

I don't know why they are freaking out about the home and community visit. Do they really think that these Black children are that different from them?

ALEXIS

Well, it's just the neighborhood that I'm worried about with these visits. It's worse than any I've ever been in in my life.

KRISTA

Yeah, my Dad's a cop and he is scared for me to go into the Belle Vue neighborhood. He doesn't want me to do it.

INSTRUCTOR

What makes you think that the Belle Vue neighborhood isn't safe? These are the homes these children at Belle Vue go to EVERY NIGHT. And why do you think there's no reading or writing going on at home? Have you ever thought that you might need to try some new strategies if he's not responding to the ones you're using?

ASHLYN

Well, I feel like Brietta knows how to read and write very well, but when I meet with her, she doesn't want to talk. I don't know what to do with her.

MARGARET

Well I just love little Javar. I just bought him all kinds of stuff for Christmas. I know he *needs* new things.

ACT II
SCENE 1: "WHAT ABOUT THE WHITE CHILDREN?"
MARY BETH

Why are we always talking about race anyway? I mean, what about the White children?

DEIDRE

Exactly. We are always talking about how poorly Black children or Latino children do on standardized tests—the achievement gap—but what about the poor White children? Don't they do poorly too? Shouldn't we look at how to address their needs?

INSTRUCTOR

Well statistics show that White children are doing very well in school compared to most children of Color. So we can conclude that teachers are doing a good job with White children. But there is this large achievement gap in education like you mentioned, Deidre, between children of Color and Whites. So that's one reason why we are talking about race.

ANN

But isn't this a literacy course? We're supposed to learn how to teach children to read and write.

MARGARET

I mean, I feel really sound as a culturally relevant teacher, but not with the literacy part.

ANN

I feel like I don't know how to teach kids to read.

AUDREY

Well we've learned a ton of literacy strategies that I use all the time with the kids at my internship.

BRIANNA

(whispering to Amy)

 What do they think we read about every week when we read our writing workshop books?

MARIA

Me too. I use "the strategies good readers use" all the time with my kids.

KAITLYN

Yeah, me too. I just taught a reading lesson on Martin Luther King where I integrated the "strategies good readers use" with the idea from Katie Wood Ray and Lisa Cleaveland of writing workshop as "having fun and making books." So the kids made their own books about their own "big words" or dreams after they read about "Martin's big words!"

KIMBER

And I took the Praxis the other day, and so many of the things we had talked about in this class were on that test! I'm thankful for all that we've learned in this class.

ACT II
SCENE 2: "I'M NOT A RACIST PERSON."
> The students have been reading a book titled *Black Ants and Buddhists: Thinking Critically and Teaching Differently in First Grade,* written by a first grade teacher named Mary Cowhey.

INSTRUCTOR

Well, to try and answer Ann's and Margaret's questions, let's think about your undergraduate program here. *Have* you had any other professors who really put issues of race and racism as the focal point? Did you know how to be a culturally relevant teacher before this course?

AMY

No. This is the only one I've had. I mean there was this one professor who talked about Singapore all the time, and compared our education system to, what would you call them, Singaporians'?

KIMBER

I think honestly the only class that has taught me about racially diverse teaching and being culturally relevant and all that is our class last semester and this class. I mean the other classes are just like basic, you know, "Think about things this way, think about things that way" but they never really like zone in on, "This is what you need to do in this situation with this particular group of children." So I know that article we read last semester, the White privilege one, and so I forget sometimes about my own privilege. But sometimes, when I'm sitting there at lunch with the Belle Vue students, I have to remember that I've lived a completely different life then they are living right now.

HALEY

I had never realized how privileged I was until this class either. I mean as far as turning on the news I'm seeing mostly my culture and skin color, even on Band-Aid's flesh colored really means White.

BETH

It's hard for me. I mean my dad is an all-out racist. He wouldn't want me learning to appreciate other cultures.

ASHLYN

I know. I mean, some people in my family still call Black people N----.

EMILY

Growing up, I often heard my parents tell my brother that they did not want him running around with a little Black boy.

JESSICA

My parents were like that too. I knew that my parents always had the belief that everyone should just date their own race, but they raised a very open-minded daughter who believed differently. See, I started dating a Black guy named Ryan about half way through my freshman year of high school. When I told my parents, I got yelled at, called names, and practically disowned. Eventually we broke up, and my parents got over the fact that I dated him, but my mom's biggest fear for me is that I am going to bring home an African American guy and tell her that he is the one for me.

MARGARET

And like, our sorority and fraternity compound, it's totally White.

EMILY

Completely.

SUMMER

But that's just how it is in the South. Since I am so accustomed to the way things in the South are, the racial slurs and stereotypes almost seem like the norm, which is somewhat of a disadvantage for me.

INSTRUCTOR

I grew up hearing the N--- word in my family too. And I grew up in a small town here in the South as well. And I've had these stereotypical views of Black people too. So I think that's why we need to examine our own privilege, because I have and still am examining my own privilege, and I feel like it *makes* me a better person and teacher.

ANN

Well, no, because my thoughts about racism from this semester and last semester haven't changed my perspective because I have never been a racist person nor will I ever be.

ALEXIS

Me either. I've had many African American friends growing up and I still do to this day!

AMY

My African American friends are so special to me. Like Brianna!

KRISTA

We are all God's children and I love everybody the same, no matter what color they are! I was raised to be a good Christian girl, so I don't think of myself as being privileged.

AMY

I try to help others. I spend my time serving people in my service sorority or with my parents at home on the weekends.

ACT II
SCENE 3: "THAT'S NOT DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE."

MEGHAN

But almost all of the students at my school are White. Can they still benefit from culturally relevant teaching?

DEIDRE

Yeah, I mean this doesn't apply to White children, right?

INSTRUCTOR

I have read that White children will also benefit from culturally relevant teaching.

> MARY BETH sighs and starts reading a book.

SUMMER

But I mean if you brought these issues up, like race and racism, in your class, wouldn't the parents would get mad at you?

MARGARET

It's not developmentally appropriate anyway. The children in my class seem to be in Piaget's pre-operational stage because they are unable to think abstractly at this point, so they would not be able to understand about race and racism.

SUMMER

You're right. It's not developmentally appropriate to discuss these things. At the pre-school level, introducing children to a complicated topic such as race would be way beyond their comprehension. That's why I wrote two culturally relevant lessons. One for my students in my internship class, and one for my Belle Vue buddy.

INSTRUCTOR

Well Mary Cowhey's first graders seemed to grasp these concepts. She has some great strategies for introducing these complex ideas to young children that I use with young children all the time. And they seem to get it. I mean look at the Belle Vue buddies. Every week I demonstrate a literacy strategy using culturally relevant teaching strategies and then they work on it with you during literacy time. And look at my own kids, they are all under age eleven, but we have learned to talk about skin color and to look for stereotypes in the media and to be critical of them. It doesn't mean we can't enjoy all the movies that are out there—we just talk about what might be stereotypical in the movie while we watch it.

KIMBER

But Mary Cowhey is from Massachusetts—near my home town. And they're way more progressive up there.

INSTRUCTOR

But doesn't that make it even more important to talk about it here?

Emily looks down and starts texting.

TIFFANY

Yeah but I just couldn't do that. It's too scary.

NICOLE

(whispering to Amanda)

I'm so tired of this class. All we ever talk about is race. It's a waste of time.

INSTRUCTOR

(shaken, because she has overheard Nicole)

Well, we've talked about a lot of difficult things but I think you guys are going to be awesome teachers, to all children. Let's go over any questions you have about what's due next class before we leave for the day.

ACT III

SCENE 1: "EVERYONE SEES COLOR; YOU'RE LYING IF YOU SAY YOU DON'T."

AMANDA

When we talk about how supposedly privileged Whites are, this makes me feel almost ashamed of being White because it sounds like we purposely put African Americans down. I do not feel like I do that as a White person, or other people that I know.

ASHLYN

Yeah, I mean the article we read was written in 1991—that's a long time ago. I don't think it's like that anymore.

DEIDRE

Yeah. I think that racism used to be a big issue, but now the big issue is heterosexism and homophobia.

AMANDA

Well, I for one think we talk too much about African American children. What about Hispanic children? At my internship school I feel like they look down on them because of their race and culture.

BRITTANY

There's this one girl, she is the only Latina in the whole class. And she's fluent in Spanish but my cooperating teacher doesn't encourage her to speak it in class. So she only gets to speak Spanish once a week in Spanish class.

AMY

I know, because we live in a country where there is not just one race and one culture but many types and I think that teachers should try to learn how to teach cultures that are different and should help their students see through the eyes of someone that is not their race.

JESSICA

Yeah, I actually change my mind about what I said about ignoring color. It *is* important to recognize our students' cultures and race, because if we ignore it, we are ignoring a part of them.

SUMMER

Color is a part of who we are. It would be ignorant to say I don't see color, because then I would be ignoring a part of who someone is.

MEGHAN

It's like, we should focus on and acknowledge race with students. I think by doing so people's needs would be better met. I feel at times that students can feel inferior because of their race. Students may not want to give their input on class topics because of stereotypes and White privilege effects. But being "blind" to color does not challenge the status quo of racism.

ASHLYN

Me too. I mean listening to Dr. Bethune speak at that lecture we had to attend gave me a lot to think about. One of the first things she said when she began her speech was the importance of strengthening African American families. I agree with her statement about how strong African American families are. So many of us are quick to judge African American families as not being supportive or not being there for their children. After listening to Dr. Bethune speak I have a new outlook on African American families and their love and ties to each other.

KAITLYN

I really have learned that it is more racist to ignore color than it is to not acknowledge it, and I know that because some of the articles we have read explain that children from urban backgrounds must be acknowledged and spoken to in a different way.

NICOLE

I do see color but I am not racist. I know that they all come from different backgrounds and cultures but I will treat them all the same. I will still treat all of my students equally.

AUDREY

I will not be biased towards my students. I will not see color or treat them any differently because of their color.

TIFFANY

I hope I will be able to *not* teach to a certain race. I have grown a lot during my time in schools and it has made me think about kids as people, not Hispanic or White or Black.

DEIDRE

You guy are lying. Everyone sees color! How and what we do with seeing the color is where the difference is.

EMILY

I just recently had to categorize the race of each student in my class at Lake Kent Elementary. One student was classified as "Native American/Pacific Islander." When I asked my coaching teacher she said she hadn't even known this. This is why I think we do have to see color, I mean she could have been incorporating his culture into her teaching but she didn't even know.

KIMBER

And you have to teach to your audience, that's what culturally relevant teaching is all about. Like last semester at a mostly White school I was very much "read a book, talk to you about it, done." And now this semester at Belle Vue I have completely changed and I'm like let's make this a collaboration kind of thing, like in the article we read on "verve" (Boykin, 1994). I like it way better here. So I think your internship placement really matters.

ANN

And it's like how from kinder to twelfth grade, I had all White teachers, so I guess that is why I never saw people of Color in books, because they chose White books subconsciously, but this is not the right way. You have to consider the Asian, Latino, African American, Native American, or Middle Eastern child in your classroom and pull books that would relate to them too.

EMILY

Yeah, and you have to find ways to value your students' home language. Before, I was a firm believer that African American Language was not a "real" language and it was just slang that African Americans used on a regular basis. I now know that it is my job to celebrate the language that so many African American children speak on a daily basis. Who am I to tell my students that they are not allowed to use their most familiar language in my classroom?

INSTRUCTOR

And so the things you're learning now I had no clue about when I started teaching. My own struggles as a White teacher who didn't know about culturally relevant teaching *brought* me to do this study with you all. I was a new, young, White teacher working in a 100% African American population school, but I had not received one iota of instruction on culturally relevant practice. I was completely unaware that there were tools for effectively teaching African American students. I had never heard the term culturally relevant classroom management. I was a statistic. Does that make sense?

KAITLYN

Yeah, you just have to say, "I don't know what goes on at home" but I'm going to be that teacher that my students love, just like I loved my first grade teacher.

ACT IV

SCENE 1: "I WANT THEM TO LOVE ME BUT THEY DON'T."
After class.
INSTRUCTOR
(thinking aloud while writing in journal)
They just don't get it. What can I do to help them understand why all of this is important? I feel like I'm on a ferris wheel that's spinning out of control! I think I'll call my friend Khali tonight and talk to her about it. And Dr. Love, I need to talk to her. At this rate I'm going to get horrible teaching evaluations. I need to figure out what to do.

Later…INSTRUCTOR is driving home. She is talking on the phone to her friend Khali and crying.

INSTRUCTOR
(talking on a cell phone to Khali)
They hate me. They think I'm the worst instructor ever. They think I haven't taught them anything about how to be a literacy teacher! I feel like some of them don't get anything I try to teach them about why it's important to place race and racism at the center of literacy education!
KHALI
Have you been explicit about how literacy concepts connect to race and racism? Maybe you can make some charts to connect the understandings together? Also, have you considered that your students are resisting these critical issues because these issues are hard for them to stomach? I need you to listen to this quote by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2009), okay?

> When you do good work on race, it should make Whites feel uncomfortable. This reaction means your work is hitting them where it hurts. But when Whites love you, your work, or your politics, you are probably doing or saying something wrong, something terribly wrong (p. 183).

INSTRUCTOR
Okay. Thank you for listening to me and helping me. You're a bright spot in this grey cloud. I'm going to meet with Dr. Love about this tomorrow. I hope that helps too.
KHALI
It's okay. I know I will be needing you too when I'm doing my data collection next year!

The next day, INSTRUCTOR is sitting at Dr. Love's dining room table.

DR. LOVE
So what is going on?
INSTRUCTOR
Ann said she doesn't know how to teach children to read. It's haunting. I can't sleep. I'm so worried. Maybe a literacy course is not the place to foreground issues of race and racism. I'm terrified that I'm going to get bad teaching evaluations. I feel hopeless, Dr. Love.
DR. LOVE
(An empathetic look on her face)

I felt that way too, INSTRUCTOR, the first time I tried to tackle these difficult issues in my classes. Maybe you could put together a book of all of the literacy strategies that you have talked about—to sort of redirect their attention to all of the literacy content you *have* discussed in the course. Then you might connect it to the issues of race and racism—bringing it back to achievement. Dr. Gloriana Crez has some great PowerPoints that look at the achievement gap here in our state that I'm sure she'd let you use.

<p style="text-align:center">INSTRUCTOR</p>
<p style="text-align:center">(tears streaming down her face)</p>

Alright. That is what I'll do.

<p style="text-align:center">**ACT IV**</p>
<p style="text-align:center">**SCENE 2: "THIS IS NOT THE URBAN COHORT."**</p>
<p style="text-align:center">*At the next class session*</p>
<p style="text-align:center">INSTRUCTOR</p>

I have put together a book of all the literacy strategies we've learned about in this class, it's called *The Literacy Day*. Let's go through it. Can anyone tell me why we connect all of these strategies to culturally relevant teaching?

<p style="text-align:center">*Blank faces all around.*</p>
<p style="text-align:center">INSTRUCTOR</p>

Achievement. We want all of our students to succeed. Not just the ones that respond the best to our culture and way of teaching, right? So let's look at these statistics about achievement, because that's why this is relevant…

<p style="text-align:center">*After the presentation*</p>
<p style="text-align:center">ANN</p>

I feel so much better about everything now. I have opened my eyes from these classes and realized that racism is still an issue, especially in schools, and I can be one who can change the endless cycle of hate. I had never noticed before …but from discussion and reading, I *have* noticed that many teachers may place stereotypes on different people because of their race. These stereotypes are things such as Asian children are the smartest, African American children make the lowest test scores or they misbehave the most, and Latino children are lazy.

<p style="text-align:center">BRITTANY</p>

That's exactly why it is only fair to treat all students equally. They are all my students and will all be treated as my students.

<p style="text-align:center">MARGARET</p>

INSTRUCTOR, you really have done a great job preparing us to be culturally relevant teachers. This has been such a good class! I've totally learned how to be culturally relevant.

<p style="text-align:center">EMILY</p>

Overall, I have become a completely new person in a very short period of time. It makes me cringe to think about my past and how I used to view people that were different from me. As a future teacher it is so very important for me to love and appreciate my students and their families…no matter what they look like, where they are from or what they believe in.

<p style="text-align:center">NICOLE</p>
<p style="text-align:center">(leaning over to speak quietly to Ashlyn)</p>

Well, I still think this class was pretty much a waste of my time.

ASHLYN
(responding to Nicole)
Yeah, I mean this is *not* the urban cohort.
CURTAIN
▪••▪

Post-Script: Unpacking *This is not the Urban Cohort.*

Goals and Framework

The preceding performance narrative highlights major themes based on a nine-month critical ethnographic (Madison, 2011) study where race and racism were placed front and center in a literacy methods course for 27 preservice teachers (all except one are White) in a large public university in the Southeastern United States. Put simply, the course acted on the premise that all people possess hidden bias and assumptions (Delpit, 2012) which inhibit effective teaching (Miller et al, 2009). Despite trends towards foregrounding issues of race and racism in higher education (e.g., Garrett & Segall, 2013; Milner, 2012) efforts so far are at best tangential (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Attempting to confront these challenges, I used critical race theory to frame course content in order to challenge these biases. I wondered how these critical ideologies might affect preservice teachers' *attitudes, dispositions, and beliefs* about race and racism as I used critical race theory to frame the course.

Critical race theory. Critical race theory (CRT) requires that course assignments and experiences: (a) challenge the permanence of race and racism with experiential and practical approaches, (b) create possibilities for marginalized social groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and (c) interrupt dominant, hegemonic racial discourses (Delgado, 2000) of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2013) or White talk (McIntyre, 1997) often expressed by preservice teachers (Lowenstein, 2009; Milner, 2008; Sleeter, 2001). Using Ladson-Billings & Tate's (1995) framework of CRT in education, I aligned each assignment with the three key tenants of CRT in education:
   1) Unmasking and exploring racism in education.
   2) Employing storytelling and counter-narrative to give testimony to oppressed and marginalized voices.
   3) Critiquing liberalism and its effects on educational law and policy.
Professional readings and multiple types of assignments and field experiences including racial/cultural memoirs, book club explorations of young adult racial texts, culturally relevant lesson plans, home/community visits/tutoring with a child, and attendance and reflection on African American symposia lectures by distinguished scholars of Color facilitated teaching from this perspective. All of these artifacts, as well as a pre/post racial attitudes questionnaire, my own field notes, and three-part phenomenological interviews conducted with five focus group students, comprised data collected and analyzed.

Methodology: Performance Analysis

As I looked at preservice teachers' attitudes and dispositions from a critical ethnographic frame (Madison, 2011), performance analysis (Conquergood, 1998; Denzin, 2003; Madison, 2005) helped to narratively analyze and construct a verbatim record of the "ambiguities, crises and deeply felt problems" (Madison, 2005, p. 160) that arose as a result of foregrounding race and racism in the course. The process of using performance analysis unfolded organically as I analyzed data. I found academic writing antithetical to expressing the White talk (McIntyre, 1997) and colorblind discourse (Bonilla-Silva, 2013) that surfaced over and over again in all data. Performance "rehydrate[d] the objectified text-bound descriptions" (Alexander, 2006, p. 415) of the study's major findings: preservice teachers' White talk (McIntyre, 1997) by allowing me to create a performance narrative that could both illustrate and combat the predominant findings of the study. Constructing the performance narrative involved cutting and pasting word- for-word data from responses to a pre- and post-course racial attitudes questionnaires, supplemented with data from students' written and oral reflections on assignments described above. The goal of the performance is to highlight four overarching findings and themes related to White talk (McIntyre, 1997) reflected in the attitudes and dispositions progressively expressed over time by the preservice teachers participating in the study:

     Act I: Colorblind Discourse
     Scene 1 ………… "I do not see color"
     Scene 2 ………… "I treat all people the same"
     Act II: White talk as Deflection Strategies
     Scene 1 ………… "What about the White children?"
     Scene 2 …………. "I'm not a racist person"
     Scene 3 …………. "It's not developmentally appropriate to talk about race"

     Act III: New Understandings and Growth
     Scene 1 …………. "Everyone sees color, you're lying if you say you don't"
     Act IV: Complexities and Ambiguities
     Scene 1…………. "I want them to love me but they don't"
     Scene 2…………. "This is not the urban cohort"

What the Performance Narrative Reveals: Preservice Teacher Attitudes and Dispositions

Acts I and II: Colorblind Discourse and White talk as Deflection Strategies. The first two acts in provide a backdrop for the discussion in this piece.   Act I reveals students' colorblind talk.   Bonilla-Silva (2013) deconstructs four forms of colorblind discourse as that which attempts to a) rationalize racial unfairness with notions of equality, b) advance the idea that some people are just racist, c) assert that racism is the result of cultural deficiencies and is the fault of people of Color, and d) draw on the argument that racism is not prevalent anymore in

American society (pp. 30-45). This Act reveals examples of many of these forms of colorblind discourse.

Colorblind discourse was prevalent mainly at the beginning of the study (before students read Ladson-Billings' (2009) "Seeing Culture, Seeing Color" and other works). Statements my students made, like, "All children are beautiful in my eyes, and I plan on giving them all the education that they deserve" and, "I see way past the color" or, "A child should not be treated differently because of their race or culture or any other reason" or, "I believe if I was of another race and had the same parental support that I had growing up, the situation would be the same as it is today" reflect such colorblind language. I separated colorblind discourse (Act I) from White talk (Act II) because students mainly used colorblind language in the beginning of the study, and this kind of discourse drifted off as we began to explore issues of racism in literacy more deeply. At the same time, even as students used less colorblind discourse, they used more insidious and resistant forms of discourse about racism and race.

Act II focuses specifically on students' resistance to issues of race and racism through "White talk,[2]" (McIntyre, 1997) veiled discourse aimed at circumventing race (Ellsworth, 1997; Lowenstein, 2009; Thandeka, 2001). White talk is discussed in detail by many (King, 1991; Lensmire, 2011; Marx, 2006; Trainor, 2005). McIntyre (1997) identified nine forms of White talk: avoidance, interruption, dismissal of counter-arguments, colluding with each other to create a culture of niceness, minimization, defensiveness, redefinition of racism to include reverse racism, declarations of commitment, and paternalism (p. 125). Utterances such as "I'm not racist. My best friend is Black" and, "We should cherish them—no matter what their home lives are like", or "We talk about how supposedly privileged Whites are, this makes me feel almost ashamed of being White because it sounds like we purposely put African Americans down" portray White talk. Usage of White talk prevailed even when students began to demonstrate growth; thus, such discourse weaves through Acts III-IV, adding context to the focus on students' growth and new understandings and continued use of White talk as deflection strategies.

Act III: New Understandings and Growth. Act III shows that, as a result of foregrounding racism and race, most White students demonstrated changes in attitudes and dispositions. It seemed that to some extent, by the end of the study, White students began to: (a) think critically about how race and racism impact teaching ("It *is* important to recognize our students' cultures and race, because if we ignore it, we are ignoring a part of them"), (b) value and implement culturally relevant pedagogy ("I think that teachers should try to learn how to teach cultures that are different and should help their students see through the eyes of someone that is not their race."), (c) acknowledge White privilege ("I had never realized how privileged I was until this class,"), (d) recognize and confront racism and ("You guys are lying. Everyone sees color"), and (e) challenge negative assumptions of people of Color ("I have a new outlook on African American families").

Presently, as I work with a focus group from this study (all now in their fourth year of teaching), learnings about race and racism have been transferred into practice. One participant, Kimber, recently expressed specific ways that she has made efforts to challenge racism and use

culturally responsive pedagogy to guide her teaching, particularly by critically aligning her teaching practices to the cultural norms of the young children she teaches. In follow-up interviews, four other study participants noted they are intentional about creating culturally relevant curriculum or choosing authentic children's literature that reflects their students' cultural characteristics and backgrounds.

Act IV: Complexities and ambiguities. Act IV renders complexities and ambiguities from this study. Although over time the students seemed to change their attitudes about racism, their transformations were not linear, simple, or complete. Data that reflect growth *simultaneously* divulge dysconscious racism or "limited and distorted" understandings about race and racism (King, 1991, p. 133). Complexities and ambiguities were reflected in, (a) continued use of deficit talk, White talk, and colorblind discourse, (b) ongoing claims of seeing race as being racist, and (c) paralysis due to shock and guilt. Statements made towards the end of the study, such as "Parents do care [about their children], *they may not show it in the same way as others or show much care*" or, "I feel that all parents do care for their children *in some way, shape, or form*", or "I think everyone loves their child *in his or her own way*" [my italics] reflect a continued reification of Whiteness—White students' felt the need to qualify positive accounts of parents and families of Color (admittedly, without having spent any extended time with people of Color), showing complexities and ambiguities wrought in their new growth and learning. Act IV points to the fact that foregrounding race and racism in a literacy methods course did make it a difficult to teach because of mounting student resistance. Teaching the course in this way did also result in lowered formal teaching evaluations at the end of the course. Therefore, these complexities point to many implications for the policy and practice of teacher educators.

Implications: Anti-Racist Interventions

Explorations of race and racism must be at the forefront of higher education programs if we are honest in our desire to teach for the success of all children (Milner, 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). In failing to do so, we merely pay lip-service to the endemic problems of race and racism in education.   Doing so creates possibilities for action, where what is generated when students employ White talk is an

> [I]nterzone, or a socially produced vertical space of interdependence between student and teacher and teacher and world, which is already located within the human psyche, a space of dormant agency, and enacted or triggered by the experience in the classroom setting (Miller, 2012, p. 95)

rather than a paralyzing, silent space of inaction. Actions within these spaces can be named *anti-racist interventions* (Nash, 2013; Nash & Miller, 2015)*,* or immediate actions taken to confront racism in the moment. An example of an anti-racist intervention follows:

Student: I'm not racist; some of my best friends are Black.
Teacher Educator: Can you explain how having friends of Color makes one less racist?

Asking students to explain stock defensive statements gives students pause to rethink their discourse. However, in order to be able to probe and stretch students' understanding in this way, we must carefully establish environments or spaces that promote honest and challenging discourse.

Create Safe Spaces for Race Talk

People who do race work know that they must create safe spaces (hooks, 2009) where people feel free to express their views and try on new perspectives (Marx, 2006; Upokodu, 2007). Establishing classroom norms for dialogue and discussion can set the tone for these difficult dialogues. In discussions of classroom norms, it's helpful to set classroom norms in which all involved:

- Set their own boundaries for sharing.

- Speak from experience, and avoid generalizing about groups of people.

- Respect confidentiality (do not share personal information shared in the class in other settings).

- Share air time.

- Listen respectfully to different perspectives.

- Do not blame or scapegoat.

- Focus on their own learning.

- Respect different experiences and perspectives (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007, pp. 67-68).

It is also important to establish, as a class, what it means to be *critical*. Briefly, being critical connotes the ability to analyze topics from more than one perspective, and to recognize subjugation and domination in literacy texts, materials, and discussions. To facilitate *critical* talk about race, encourage readings, discussions, readings, and other engagements that involve self-reflection and questioning how ideologies subjugate people of Color (Earick, 2009). Crafting racial memoirs can be crucial to engaging students in thinking and writing about their racialized selves. The following guiding questions can guide the creation/revisitation of a racial memoir:

> First, write about your earliest racial memory. How have race/racism shaped your life experience? How does racial privilege relate/not relate to your memory? How have your views toward race and culture changed since this first time you wrote your memoir? What experiences have helped to change your views?

Create Spaces for Counter-Narratives

An important support for engaging students in race talk is to hear and reflect on counter-narratives of people of Color.   Counter-storytelling[3] challenges hidden biases and dominant views towards race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) as "[counter] narratives may begin a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding [us] of our common humanity" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 43).   Teacher educators bring counter-narratives into the classroom through guest speakers: not only university lecture series, but also through Skype and or web-based video links. In this study, discussions   board seemed to result in more meaningful dialogue.   forums can help facilitate critical discussions about race and racism because it is often perceived by students as a less threatening place to offer their points of view (Ottenson, 2006; Prensky, 2007).

The use of specific professional texts/readings can also generate counter-narratives. Texts related to culturally relevant pedagogy, linguistic pluralism, critical literacy, anti-racist teaching, and family and community literacies build students' schema about issues of equity. Table 1 provides a selected bibliography of relevant professional texts.

Table 1. Bibliography of Counter-Narratives that Promote Race Talk.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children* (2nd ed*.)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
Boutte, G. S., & Hill E. L. (2006). African American communities: Implications for culturally relevant teaching. *New Educator, 2*(4), 311–329.
Brown, D. F.   (2003). Urban teachers' use of culturally responsive management strategies. *Theory Into Practice, 42* (4), 277-282.
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Edwards, P. A., McMillon, G. T., & Turner, J. D. (2010). *Change is gonna come: Transforming literacy education for African American students*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
Foster, M. (1997) *Black teachers on teaching*. New York, NY: The New Press.
Gangi, J. (2008). The Unbearable whiteness of literacy. *Multicultural Review*. Spring Issue. Retrieved from http://www.mcreview.com.
Gay, G. (2011). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
Boykin, W. (1994). Harvesting culture and talent: African American children and education reform. In R. Rossi (Ed.), *Educational reform and at-risk students* (pp. 243-273). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
Taylor, D. (1997). *Many families, many literacies: An international declaration of principles*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Wheeler, R. S., & Swords, R. (2006). *Code-switching: Teaching standard English in urban classrooms*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Reyes, M., de la Luz (Ed.). (2011). *Words were all we had: Becoming biliterate against the odds*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Santa Ana, O. (2004). *Tongue tied: The lives of multilingual children in public education.* New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield.

Negotiate Tensions and Challenges

Even when careful conditions are established, foregrounding race and racism in a course does not guarantee an ideological makeover; the performance narrative portrays persistent student resistance with racism and the need for anti-racist interventions. As Smoothe (2008) indicates, we must learn how to navigate these tensions. The points of anti-racist interventions are to "approach the inevitable 'that sounded racist' conversation" (Retrieved from http://www.illdoctrine.com.) with people. The following sections outline several helpful strategies for negotiating anti-racist interventions.

Legitimize a focus on African Americans. King (2005) has said, "Humane and equitable education for and about Black people is a condition of humane and equitable education, justice, and human freedom for all" (p. 349). And yet, during the study, students repeatedly minimized issues concerning African Americans, implying the need to provide a *rationale* for a concentration on the education of African American students. Therefore, we must *name* specific attention on African American students, explaining why this emphasis is needed within a multi-layered approach to equity (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). A useful strategy involves linking that focus to statistics showing how schools and other institutions have failed African Americans (e.g., www.childrensdefensefund.org).

Study Whiteness. The study of Whiteness can also facilitate students' understanding about the role it plays in normalizing hegemonic discourses. Yet, discussions of Whiteness *must go beyond* White privilege. They should be carefully scaffolded to demonstrate how Whites contribute to racism through inaction and White talk. This study also points to the need to actively include preservice teachers of Color in discussions of Whiteness. For example, Brianna (the African American student in the study) said she had to learn to "get used to" our discussions about Whiteness. This indicates the need to structure discussions in such a way that everybody, particularly students of Color, feel they have a voice.

Study White talk. Interrogating others' White talk is also a useful entrée into negotiating these challenges. Students could first read excerpts from McIntyre's (1997) work on White talk to gain some background. An abbreviated introduction that could be used might be:

McIntyre (1997) and later Kivel (2002) discuss many forms of White talk that occur when Whites are confronted with issues of racism. These include: *avoidance, interruption, dismissal of counter-arguments, colluding with each other to create a culture of niceness, minimization, defensiveness, redefinition of racism to include reverse*

racism, declarations of commitment, and paternalism. Some new forms of White talk constructed from my study were: (a) perpetuating negative stereotypes, (b) surprise about functional families, (c) hyper-evaluation of students, families, and communities, (d) glorifying and romanticizing communities and families, and (e) re-inscribing Whiteness (Nash & Miller, 2015, p. 196).

Class members could go to any blog, news outlet, newspaper, chat room, or television talk show where race and/or racism are discussed (pay special attention to the comments)—White talk will be prevalent. Recent fruitful examples could be looking at responses to non-indictment of Black victims of police brutality or reading the comments for the Cheerios commercial portraying an interracial family and child.

Those in higher education must also analyze their/our own racial discourse. This is important because even though students in this study could critique *others'* use of language, most were unaware of how their *own* language circumvented and/or justified racism. One way that this can be done is through turning a critical eye on our own conversations and reflections about race, after the fact. Writing and revisiting racial memoirs (memoirs of one's earliest racial memory) can facilitate self-discourse analysis.

Critically engage in Allyism. Learning about the concept of the White ally may also assist in the providing a hopeful anti-racist stance to students who often feel defensive when thinking about race. Understanding allyism can lead to real and tangible actions that can be taken to contradict White talk and confront issues of White racism (Thompson, 2003). Collective suggestions for taking this stance (Aveling, 2002; Titone, 2000) include:

- Do not expect that people of color should teach you how to behave non-oppressively
- Work on racism for your sake, not "their" sake
- Assume that you are needed and capable of being a good ally
- Know that you'll make mistakes and commit yourself to correcting them and continuing on as an ally, no matter what
- Challenge oppression. Take a stand against it no matter the challenges.

However, we must be able to understand that merely calling yourself an "ally" is not the point; the point is to engage in a constant critical evaluation of your actions and discourse about race and racism, and then do something about it.

Conclusion: We Weren't the Urban Cohort, so What Were We?

The performance narrative "This is not the Urban Cohort" showcases a range of *reflections* and *deflections* in an exploration of literacy methods from a critical race foundation. With White talk like, "talking about race is a waste of my time" or, "we're not the urban cohort," students in the study rationalized why they should not have to enter into discussions of race and racism. The avoidance denoted by the statement, "We're not the urban cohort," masks a discomfort with the unscrupulous feelings that inevitably surface when issues of race and racism are foregrounded as they are in urban settings cohorts. The performance narrative forefronts such talk, not to excuse it, but to understand the complexities involved (Lensmire, 2011) as we

attempt to foreground race in higher education contexts. It brings to light the *urgent need* for a united focus on race and racism in higher education. After the study, five students who participated in member checking drafts of this performance piece commented that the very fact that the White students in our class were dysconsciously racist and were employing White talk in so many situations involving race clearly demonstrated the *need* for deep discussions and dialogues about race and racism throughout entire programs of higher education and preservice teacher preparation—leading one to say, "Why weren't ALL the cohorts urban-focused?"

This study suggests White talk occurred when one's goodness was in question, reflecting complex and deeply felt emotions behind the discourse (Trainor, 2005). In other words, most White students seemed to avoid race through White talk because they did not want to perceive themselves or be perceived as bad or mean. Such emotions lead to paternalistic comments such as "I love all the children, no matter what happens at home," shutting down race talk when it becomes too difficult.

Many factors seemed to influence both the changes in attitude *and* the persistence of racism in these preservice teachers' talk: their internship placements, supported opportunities to read and discuss about racism, immersive experiences with non-majority cultural/ethnic groups, scaffolded observations of children from non-majority cultures, and listening to counter-narratives of success and brilliance in communities of Color. In fact, students who demonstrated the greatest change were placed in internship locations where a majority of students were persons of Color.

And so, findings from this study are multifaceted. While some students articulated critical opinions about combatting racism, they often used White talk in the same sentence. White students acknowledged their privilege and understood the unfairness of that privilege for students of Color, but often proposed solutions of equality and fairness that perpetuated those privileges, rather than suggesting racially equitable ones. Even the White students who made the most startling leaps in terms of confronting negative assumptions about children of Color still held on to hegemonic discourse about these same children, and continue to use this discourse as I keep up with some of them.

Thus, those of us who are working to learn and unlearn racism face many struggles and questions: Why are White students in particular unable to let go of this discourse? Why don't some students adopt the critical stance we hope they will? Why do they seem to let go of colorblind discourse in some statements while maintaining a colorblind stance when it came to reflecting on actual teaching practices?   Is it easier to narrate anti-racism than practice it?

My quest for answers continues, but for now I wonder why our institution chose to delineate between Urban and non-Urban focused programs in the first place, planting the seed in students' minds that education for urban students exists on the periphery of 'regular' teacher education. Yet, in this case, we were *not* the Urban Cohort, but foregrounding race and racism in this literacy methods course was one small attempt to become aware of and struggle against racism in education. We were not the Urban Cohort, but we did realize that we all hold bias. Although we were not the Urban Cohort, we did engage in culturally relevant teaching practices. We were not the Urban Cohort, but I know silence and unwillingness to intervene represents complicity with racism. After the study, one student wrote that unwillingness to take action when faced with inequity is much like the stance taken by those who witness a murder on the street outside their home, but do nothing about it, "because they figure someone else will surely

do it." Declaring "We're not the Urban Cohort" is like such complicity, willingly allowing the hard work of tackling racism to be someone else's job. It is my hope that sharing this performance narrative might be a means of interrupting racism in higher education.

Notes

[1] All names of persons and places are pseudonyms.2.White talk will be capitalized to credit McIntyre.
[2] Narratives that are aimed at countering the "validity of accepted…myths" about people of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 142).

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