Fervent Fortitudes:

Curriculum at the Intersection of Emotions and Race

TANETHA J. GROSLAND *University of South Florida*

CHERYL E. MATIAS
University of Colorado—Denver

A "SUMMER OF PAIN" is how one journalist described what was happening in a Roseville, Minnesota classroom, just a few miles from where a Saint Paul Public School employee named Philando Castile was shot and killed by a police officer in Falcon Heights in July of 2016 (Wastvedt, 2016). In that suburban Saint Paul classroom, children voiced their concerns about police brutality and racial tension, and that "they're killing us" (Wastvedt, 2016). In this classroom—and across the United States—race-related conversations create affective responses that make such learning *emotional labor*. This type of racial "knowledge" or "emotional burden" (Matias, 2013; Grosland, 2013) may result in emotional reactions such as disengagement and/or emotional disregard. If learners emotionally distance themselves, then positive change related to racism is arguably almost impossible because the effects of inflicted racism are inherently emotional. If educators ignore—by accident or by choice—the emotions involved, how can they fully understand the curricular subject and its implications? If educators fail to risk the emotional fortitude or withstand the emotional labor, how will they truly learn what pain racism causes? Thus, understanding the *emotionality* of race, and learning how to engage antiracism, is an essential aspect to enacting the curricular changes we so hope for.

It is known that emotion is a pivotal element in the process of teaching and learning. Scholarly conceptions include Noddings (1992), who proposes the emotional need for caring in teaching; Palmer (2007), who argues the need for emotional courage to engage in the process of teaching; and Nieto (2003), who claims educators must teach as love. Emotions become powerful indicators of one's motivations, behaviors, and ideologies. In fact, with respect to white racialization, Thandeka (1999) argues that white ethnic shame is the emotional precursor that undergirds emotional displays in racial dialogues. Leonardo and Porter (2010) argue that the emotional fear of latent racial violence is another underlying emotion that produces common dynamics in interracial dialogues. Clearly, the importance of emotionality must be considered in order to engage in processes of anti-oppression in education. This is particularly why the discursive interplay of emotion and race provides a unique opportunity to rethink and re-envision

pedagogy. As such, the purpose of this paper is to inform and expand pedagogies in the context of emotionally-charged race conversations.

As our own work and that of other scholars within and outside higher education has shown, topics related to race are laden with emotional intensity (e.g., Grosland, 2013; Hansen, 2015; Lensmire, 2011; Lewis & Tierney, 2011; Matias, 2013; Matias & Grosland, 2016; Trainor, 2008; Vaught, 2012; Wagner, 2005; Wang 2008). Knowing this, we were compelled to conduct a systematic inquiry into emotional responses and race, not only to improve our own pedagogies, but also to inform the field broadly. We do this by first putting forth, defining, and thoroughly explaining key claims related to emotions in education, as well as those in racial literacy. Then, to theorize these as pedagogical possibilities, we examine some current literature on pedagogy related to race, as well as share findings from our study of a job-embedded, professional-practice graduate course for full-time practicing educators. We find two types of experiential narratives: pity and emotional negativity toward racially-minoritized colleagues by showing emotional negativity toward the Black/African American children they served. Based on our findings, we argue for an intentional curricular focus on race and emotions.

Methodology and Theoretical Background

We conducted our inquiry of race and emotion using qualitative approaches influenced by narrative and Maxwell's (2005) four guidelines for building a conceptual framework: 1) existing theory and research, 2) exploratory qualitative data, 3) one's own experiential knowledge, and 4) "thought experiments." The course we studied, "Culturally Responsive Classroom Management," was a required, mixed-level, graduate course (doctoral, masters, and/or specialist) with 26 students from multiple racial backgrounds. In deciding how to frame our study and choose narratives, we made note of the plethora of literature that characterizes the reluctance of White, future and practicing educators to address racial issues. Although this scholarship is rich, we chose not to focus on such a narrow group and instead chose a lens of critical emotionality to explore all the students, regardless of professional role and racial identity. Exploring the interracial power dynamics of emotions between students in this class makes for a substantial contribution and would require an additional paper. Knowing that race and racism affect all, we chose to study the class in its entirety, which allowed us a way to explore how emotions are formed in contact with, move between, and stick to bodies (see Ahmed, 2004). In terms of their criticality, emotions also circulate between bodies, relate to power, and create boundaries (Ahmed, 2004). Thus, an entire classroom of multiple bodies from various racial backgrounds provides a data-rich environment to broadly explore emotions.

The course we studied was part of a job-embedded, online/hybrid-online, and face-to-face graduate degree program in leadership, a program for full-time, school-based educators at the PreK-12 levels. Our purpose was to understand the role of emotions and race in a job-embedded, professional-practice course (although the online element of this course was ripe with discovery). Neither author was involved in the course's development, so racial literacy and the emotionality of race were not initial pedagogical frameworks for the course.

However, Tanetha Jamay implemented the course and, based on that experience, we knew that elements of race and emotion were salient throughout its duration. Furthermore, considering that the major theme of this course was cultural responsiveness in schools, it is known that

culturally responsive education involves issues of race and racism (Gay, 2002; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2005, 1998, 1996, 1994). Hence, we entered this research wondering: How do students emotionally experience a class focused on issues of educational equity? In what ways do emotion and race discourses relate? We used these ideas to frame our research.

Through teaching this course, as well as through our own experiences teaching about social issues, we the authors have a heightened awareness of how emotional and race discourses inherently weave rich complex stories. Therefore, when considering our methodological choices, we realized that practitioner inquiry was a viable way to characterize our research. However, for this particularly study we wanted to use narrative inquiry to broadly focus on interpreting experiences through stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), rather than narrow our design, data collection, and interpretation of data around a question related to our own practice, such as in practitioner inquiry (see Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). Thus, narrative seemed a better fit because it is a distinct form of discourse that involves reporting the narrator's emotions, thoughts, interpretations, and events (see Chase, 2005). That is, our understanding of stories and emotions —from this class, as well as from our background knowledge—influenced our methodological decision to choose an inductive approach involving analysis of narratives. This approach included collecting and analyzing multiple narratives to arrive at generalizations about a group being studied (see Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). Focusing on students' emotion (e.g., excited, sad, overwhelmed, upset, emoticons) and race discourses (e.g., people "of color," diverse, urban, Black, Latino, White), our analysis included reviewing and making notes on the data in chronological order, building conceptual categories by grouping recurring concepts together, and examining how the categorized data related to our theoretical frameworks in emotions and racial literacy.

Throughout the study—especially during data analysis—we attended to Maxwell's (2005) guidelines by reflecting on the role of own experiential knowledge. As racially under-represented, female, urban educators (i.e., former teachers who are now education researchers), we conducted inter-researcher dialogues about our personal and pedagogical experiences with emotions and race conversations. As minoritized women, we regularly experienced the impact of Whiteness on our personal and professional lives. We are critically aware and conscious about this positionality and the challenges and possibilities we faced in teaching about social or "controversial" issues. During our study, we bolstered validity by noting how our own background knowledge informed our "response community" and our level of "wakefulness" in the research processes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In addition to wakefulness, we considered issues like the plausibility, trustworthiness, and coherence of the narrative (see Riessman, 1993). However, in narrative inquiry "every response is valid to some degree and contains the seed of an important point" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 181) and thus every emotion is valid and meaningful. To conclude our inquiry, we conducted "thought experiments" by drawing on theory and experience to develop logical implications for curriculum (Maxwell, 2005, p. 59). Our thought experiments included ongoing peer briefings via e-mail, face-to-face conversations, and telephone calls. Such an interplay of sources provided an avenue to explore the intersection of emotion and race, and its implication for pedagogy.

Our theoretical claims are grounded in critical emotion studies and racial literacy. Emotional responses can be understood as moral and ethical messages about how to improve pedagogy on "controversial" social topics, to investigate the genuineness of one's pedagogies, or both (see Boler, 1999; Grosland, 2013; Grosland, 2014; Zembylas, 2007). The goal is not to mute or change emotional responses, but rather to provide opportunities for emotional self-

reflection as a pathway for antiracist change (Grosland, 2010, 2013; Matias, 2013b; Zembylas, 2008, 2010). A closer look at the role of emotions and pedagogy provides an avenue by which to address emotional limitations, as well as to build on emotional strengths. What is known as "emotion" is conceptualized as subjective, complex, and contextual, but we nevertheless offer certain claims about emotions in education to frame this paper, as follows.

Although riddled with challenges, investigating emotions in education holds great promise in informing understandings of teaching, motivation, and self-regulated learning (Schutz & Decuir, 2002). One reason is because emotions are rooted in a complex social web; so, instead of rendering emotions as innate in individuals uncomplicated by society, emotions also "reflect our complex identities situated within social hierarchies" (Boler, 1999, p. 3). This situation gives a reason why individuals should study social context (e.g., socioeconomic status, geographical location) in relations to an individual's emotions (Schutz & Decuir, 2002; Zembylas, 2008). Emotion as self-reflection "provides the potential to reflect on one's complex and layered social-historical context and the objective reality of one's thoughts" in order to understand emotions as they happen in education (Schutz & Decuir, 2002, p. 126).

Therefore, one's emotions are responses to one's identity; they are not removed from the socio-political complexities in society. Bourdieu (1991), for example, argues that there is symbolic violence in language that depends on two factors: 1) the speaker himself and 2) how that speaker is positioned in society. Therefore, just as language—an element of one's identity—can be symbolically violent to receivers who are socially positioned below a speaker in a given socio-political climate, emotions too are given credence by society depending on the identities of the speaker in a given hierarchical society. Suffice it to say, a white supremacist society acknowledges merely three-fifths of the value of emotional responses to racism from people of color; in contrast, it gives full attention to a white person when he or she expresses discomfort in talking about race (Matias, 2013). As such, we apply critical emotion theories to acknowledge that emotion is, ipso facto, a discursive practice wrought with the racial complexities of a given society. We address the emotionality of the course, which is on cultural responsiveness; however, trying to better understand how to improve such pedagogy also involves focusing on the role of race. We use racial literacy to do this.

In order to take action rooted in racial literacy, one must know the definition of "racial literacy." Racial literacy is defined as understanding the contextuality of race and the relationship between race and power, while continually learning about race from a learner stance rather than a knower stance, and taking appropriate antiracist action (Guinier, 2004; Horsford, 2009, 2011; Mosley, 2010; Mosley & Rogers, 2011; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Sealey-Ruiz, 2011a, 2011b; Skerrett, 2011; Twine, 2004). Such literacy also engages both individual and institutional forces (such as socio-historical contexts), never loses sight of race, deconstructs ideologies that perpetuate a neutrality of race, and recognizes intersectionality (Guinier, 2004; Horsford 2009, 2011).

Myriad actions are involved in becoming racially literate; it would be difficult to list all possibilities. Yet practices in curriculum design could include:

- Focusing learning and activities on the discursive practices, analytical skills, and conceptual tools of antiracism (Twine, 2004)
- Utilizing resources that focus on the history of traditionally minoritized racial groups (Horsford, 2009)
- On-going study of the contextual history of the community served (Horsford, 2009)

• Understanding and identifying the workings of race and racism work to allocate resource and distribute power in school communities (Horsford, 2009)

All the elements of racial literacy, as Rogers and Mosley (2006) explain, are political and focused on social justice. Therefore, racial literacy could mean noticing when specific racial terms (e.g. "Black," "Mixed," or "Hmong-American") are substituted with vague social terms (e.g., "urban" or "low-income"). Words like these—and those of "values," "incompatible cultures," and "complex differences"—are a discursive deflection that Yon (2000) calls "new racism." Although called new, the function of using such discourse nonetheless results in the "same ole" oppression" (Cross, 2005, 2003). Social discourse not only includes words (verbal and symbolic) but also emotions as embodied discursive practices, which too are subject to a deployment of discursive deflection. In this paper we build off this to include false empathy, in order to use it for our analysis.

Emotions on the Job: The Inseparability of Emotions and Race

Although courses and professional development on equity are important, we posit that an increase in such classes alone is shortsighted without pedagogy that intersects emotions and the contemporary workings of racism. We support this claim by sharing findings related to the discursive interactions of emotions and race in a job-embedded, professional-learning, graduate course for full-time practicing educators on culture.

Students in the class were educational leaders such as professional developers, teacher leaders, administrators, and those who worked in the main building or headquarters for their respective school districts. Most students in the class served families from traditionally underserved and low-socioeconomic communities.

Such a course was appropriate for exploring emotions and race because the course design required students to complete job-embedded assignments designed to interrupt oppression and increase equity in their schools. Examples of these assignments included developing and implementing action plans, and engaging ongoing loops of critical reflection. Required job-embedded assignments were focused on improving conditions for those traditionally marginalized in schools per social factors (e.g., race, class/socio-economic status, culture, gender, and language). We chose to highlight portions of narratives from Rafaelina, Rochelle, and Tamika¹ as they best demonstrate the interconnectedness of emotions and race.

In sharing elements of Rochelle's and Rafaelina's narratives, we parallel them consecutively to demonstrate how their race discourses are linked to what most would consider to be negative emotions. Rochelle is a principal of an elementary school that serves mostly underserved students from low-income families that are Black/African American. In her action research assignment, she writes her plans to improve conditions at her school. In this assignment she explained how she plans to ask her teachers about their beliefs regarding discipline and serving diverse groups of students. In the introduction of her paper she explains the climate of her school:

Almost 90% of the students come to school from homes facing low socioeconomic circumstances, and about 80% of the students are Black. I heard stories from inside and outside the school about classrooms and common areas

overrun with students exhibiting assorted acting out and violent behaviors, and school data indicated an unreasonable amount of student fights, suspensions from school, and numbers of absences and tardies. Teachers shared stories about how the district had ignored their pleas for help and had, in fact, made decisions that actually set the school up to fail. I simply couldn't imagine how all of this could possibly be completely true.

Rochelle narrates how her school demographic (race and class) is associated with "acting out and violent behavior" or "fights," (acts of emotion), and notes that her teachers made multiple emotional requests ("pleas") for "help." In her story she contextualizes emotions that many would consider negative within the racial dynamics of her school student body, which is 80% Black.

Like Rochelle, Rafaelina is also an elementary school principal who serves traditionally underserved students from low-income families. Rafaelina also engaged racial discourse in the context of emotion. In her writing, Rafaelina uses emotional discourse to make sense of the possibilities and pitfalls of equity in her school. Beginning her narrative, she shared that, as a leader, she is committed to equity—with the caveat that:

Just as teachers are susceptible to learned helplessness and a defensive rather than offensive use of educational practice, educational leaders must resist the temptation to fall victim to external pressures and leadership fatigue. As a weapon against the fatality of my career, I am committed to a continued pursuit of cultural responsiveness throughout my career.

Her commitment in the context of the emotional state of "learned helplessness" and "temptation" (an emotional desire) is a prelude to narratives involving special education "roadblocks" related "red tape of the bureaucracy." Again, reiterating her "commitment," Rafaelina shared that:

One significant obstacle that could potentially inhibit my ability to maintain these commitments is the ever-changing policies and red tape of the bureaucracy that results in the inequitable distribution of students into predetermined categories within the school . . . disproportionate representation of minorities in special education classes and anticipated graduation rates . . . I do not have the ability to make direct changes to these policies, nor am I able to erase the negative experiences already established among the students and families affected by this injustice. Furthermore, I am unable to control the demographic makeup of the whole school population.

Rafaelina also highlights the hurt and pain of racial injustice, by noting that "minority" overrepresentation in special education has an emotional toll on families "affected by this injustice." Part of the assignment also asked students to address the limitations of their action plans; but instead of addressing limitations within her own realm of control, she relinquishes herself by focusing on limitations that she cannot control.

Here, since emotions are a racial discourse, both Rochelle's and Rafaelina's experiential narratives contain elements of emotional negativity and pity toward racially-minoritized communities. Such an emotional discourse is *false empathy*—something that runs rampant in

education but rarely revealed. These emotional states are a process that positions their students, particularly their urban students who are African American and Latinx, as disgusting and something worth pitying (see Duncan, 2002; Matias & Zembylas, 2014). Although Rochelle notes the link between being negatively judged based on race and the affective nature of living racially-minoritized, it is limited.

False empathy becomes problematic when practitioners do not realize and take responsibility for their preconceived biases based on how they are racially positioned, in addition to their own and society's negative emotional scripts regarding racially-minoritized people. This is because the institutionalized emotional toll is not only felt by families with school-aged children and students, but by their racially conscious teachers as well. In Tamika's example, she narrates how her colleague was "uncomfortable" with discussing race to a class of Black/African American students; so instead of taking an increased experiential learning lead and asking Tamika to play a professional collegial support role (e.g., co-teaching, consulting, or collecting data and giving feedback), Tamika facilitated the discussion:

We kept the morning meeting pretty light on Wednesday, mainly sticking with greetings. At the end of the day on Wednesday, the teacher came to me and told me that the students were yelling, "You black boy/girl," at each other. She did not understand why they were doing this because all of the students are African American but knew that they were being hurtful to one another because of the tone of voice they were using. I explained that the students were most likely referring to each other's skin complexion. We decided we should have a discussion with the students regarding their race. The teacher was not comfortable having the discussion with the students. So it was decided that I would lead the discussion.

This narrative is riddled with the emotionality of race. Tamika's anonymous colleague described students as "yelling" loud cries of "you black boy/girl," and due to their "tone of voice" were being "hurtful." In this context, "yelling" is depicted as an undesirable tone of voice used as an emotional expression to inflict racial hurt on another. Thus, the anonymous colleague associates race discourse in the context of emotional expression as negative. However, instead of perpetrating this negative depiction, Tamika contextualizes these racialized emotional expressions by explaining to her colleague that the students' intent was not malice.

Similar to our teaching experiences, Tamika's experience is problematic because she is one of the few brown, minoritized, and racially conscious teachers in her building positioned as an expert to help her colleague who is emotionally "uncomfortable" with teaching about race. Unfortunately, these experiences are all too common for many teachers who are both brown and minoritized working in hypersegregated contexts.

Regardless of whether a brown and minoritized teacher is racially conscious or not, these educators are nevertheless often called upon to be race "experts." Since education is an emotional situation (Britzman, 2013) and teaching is thus emotional, to position certain teachers as race experts increases their emotional burden and stress, which contributes to burnout, especially for those who are already racially under-represented in their profession. We are not arguing that racially conscious teachers should not be used as collaborative resources, but it is important to not overly depend on them and disregard their emotional well-being. Job-embedded learning that addresses the emotions of racial burden and the importance of taking more

experiential learning leads is worthwhile for all professionals, regardless of their racial status.

Considering the racial disparities in K–12 schooling, it would have behooved students enrolled in this job-embedded, professional-practice course to consider the role of race, racism, and racial emotionality. In a society where race is extremely salient, it was unfortunate that learning objectives on the emotional investments in race were initially absent. This is why, in this context, we envision a pedagogy that: 1) engages the elements of racial literacy as a way to notice race and racism, 2) studies the socio-historical context of one's own emotions related to race (racial investments), and 3) examines this information to personalize antiracist action in schools.

We Must Feel Before We Know: Pedagogies of Emotions and Racial Literacy

"We have to feel before we know," says Britzman (2013, p. 97), and this is why we conducted this exploration of the relationship between emotional and racial discourses in a jobembedded, professional-practice graduate course for full-time practicing educators. To summarize, our study found that the students in the course felt pity and emotional negativity toward racially-minoritized people. This raises the question: *How can one be competent enough to address racial inequality and the subsequent emotions when starting from a place of negativity*?

Although learning racial literacy skills could help practitioners understand race contextually, racial literacy alone is limited. Shim (2014) makes a similar claim when she argues that, without considering emotions, efforts of antiracism may contribute to inequity instead of deconstructing it. Also, Matias and Zembylas (2014) posits how some White teachers claim to express pity, compassion, and care for their urban students of color; yet, further examination reveals a deep-rooted sentiment of disgust for these students. Plainly, by not critically investigating the emotional terrain when engaging in race, one can sentimentalize emotions (also see Gachago, Ivala, Chigona, and Cody, 2015)—that is, one can express the socially-appropriate emotion in order to mask the deeper emotion of disgust.

These issues, along with the results of our study, are why we call for a curriculum shift that considers the intersections of emotions and racial literacy. This may include job-embedded, professional-development courses in which racial literacy and critical emotionality awareness are objectives. It may also call for the inclusion of job-embedded assignments that apply racial literacy, experiential learning, and critical emotional reflexivity (that is, critical emotional reflection that changes adult behavior; see Zembylas, 2008). Going further, the curriculum could call for including racial literacy and emotional considerations in the development of protocols related to description, interpretation, and evaluation (DIE). In such a structure, similar to the Intercultural Communication Institute's protocol (2008), practitioners would first describe the racial inequity in their schools using race terms, interpret the inequality by using a framework of racial literacy, and then evaluate the racial inequity by using feelings terms.

In order to drive action after something like the DIE, the type of pedagogy we propose may include *racial literacy goal setting*. Goal setting is important because, in the way that Schultz and Decuir (2002) suggest, it is a vehicle to explain how feelings are experienced in relation to one's goals, as well as a process for thinking, acting, and emoting. Such goal setting and goal appraisal can take up questions such as, "Is this going the way I hoped?" or "Can I handle the situation?" (Schultz & Decuir, 2002, p. 127). Thus, how individuals answer such

questions "influence[s] the emotions they experience, the intensity of those emotions, and the emotional regulation they use during self-direction" in experiential racial literacy endeavors (Schultz & Decuir, 2002, p. 127). Also notable is how emotions are nonlinear; therefore, such a pedagogy should examine how emotions change over time, the process related to the experience, and the meaning of the emotion (Schultz & Decuir, 2002). Goal setting through emotional and racial literacy lenses provides an opportunity to better understand how one's own emotions change over time and how these emotions interact with one's own racial positionality and equity actions.

Conclusion

Based on our critical examinations of our experiential knowledge and the pedagogies employed in a job-embedded, professional-practice graduate course for full-time practicing educators on cultural responsiveness, we conclude that improvement involves engaging both emotions and the practicality of racial literacy. This conceptualization of the workings of race and emotion expands social justice pedagogies, particularly for job-embedded professional development; more important, it is a reminder of the inseparable connection between our humanity as emotional beings and the emotionality of race. For how can we become more racially literate and develop fervent fortitude without emotionally investing in the topic of race in the first place? Beyond the discomfort or the guilt one feels in learning about race, the curricular and pedagogical inclusion of emotions and racial literacy is a perfect—albeit tumultuous—unification that gets to the crux of racial equity.

Notes

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¹ Pseudonyms

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