Teaching Race, Being Other: Development of a Race Pedagogy

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Abstract: In this paper we argue that Black professors should be intentional in their pedagogy when teaching about race. The authors use their personal teaching experiences to demonstrate a need for a race pedagogy. We argue that Black faculty must be conscious of three dimensions which are important in pedagogical decision making and impact praxis.

Introduction

Race is a sensitive topic and one that is not easily discussed in adult education classrooms. It has an insidious influence on both the educator and learner who feel the impact on the teaching-learning interaction. Much literature has been dedicated to helping White educators understand the significance of their racial identity especially when teaching topics that have a racialized component but little literature has focused on developing a theory of praxis based on the experience of Black educators who teach about race. This paper offers guideposts for Black educators which may assist them in being more intentional in their pedagogy and development of a pedagogical understanding of how to teach about race when you are "the other". Being "the other" is a critical characteristic that Black adult educators must consider in their development of a pedagogy of teaching race. This paper describes four dimensions believed to impact the pedagogical decision making of Black educators.

Literature Review

There is little literature that addresses how Black adult educators might pedagogically approach the teaching of race in adult education classrooms. In searching through the literature, we discovered that there were three pedagogical approaches consistently named as tools in teaching about race: multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and antiracist education but none adequately addressed issues relevant to the teaching of race when you are "the other".

Multicultural education is a popular curricular innovation and has been promoted as best practice or several decades. It focuses on the idea of diversity infusion into the curricula. It has been described as "an idea, or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process" (Banks, 1995, p. 391) and according to Banks (2002) occurs on a continuum. The continuum has five major points. Educators can use any point or combination to shape their curricula: content integration, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and

empowering school culture and social culture. Multicultural education as a pedagogical approach provides a continuum in terms of goals and outcomes for teaching about race from simply including a historic figure to challenging societal structures. Educators using multicultural education as a guide ultimately want to create a learning environment conducive to the learning of all.

Culturally relevant pedagogy, also known as culturally responsive pedagogy, is another theoretical formulation advanced to help educators. Ladson-Billings (1995) said culturally relevant pedagogy is a pedagogical strategy that "systematically includes student culture in the classroom" (p. 483). Some see it as a dimension of teacher competence. Its central focus is on meeting the needs of marginalized students whose cultures are different from that of the educators'. It is framed within ideologies of cultural pluralism, critical consciousness and collective empowerment. As a pedagogical approach, culturally relevant pedagogy highlights the significance of the educators' awareness of the need to be more inclusive as well as the importance of helping students attend to issues of power and privilege in their lived experience. Guy (1999) also advocates a more wholistic approach to culturally relevant adult education that includes educator cultural self-awareness, recognition of learner cultural identity, and critical evaluation of teaching material and processes.

Antiracist education is the final body of literature on teacher pedagogy reviewed. Gupta (2003) defines it as a process to dismantle systemic and institutionalized racism (p. 456). Antiracist education emphasizes inequity, imbalances of power, and racial exploitation caused by how society is structured (Kehoe, 1993, p. 4). Unlike multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy, antiracist education centers race as the primary construct to be considered in pedagogical development. It has activist's leanings with a primary goal of consciousness raising within the dominant cultural group. Kailin (2002) grouped antiracist education into five categories: Left-oriented movements framed by Marxist ideology, Black nationalist movements, consciousness raising, critical whiteness theory, and critical race theory (p. 57). Collectively, the categories seek to raise the awareness of privileges garnered, oppression manifested, and ideology inculcated as a result of being a member of the dominant cultural group.

Each pedagogical approach - multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and antiracist education - offer clues to the development of pedagogy for teaching race but none alone or in combination offer such a praxis for racialized faculty. This represents a void in the theoretical literature.

A Proposed Model

As educators of color we recognized that commonalities amongst our experiences in teaching race and race-based topics in our classrooms were not well represented in the commonly advanced pedagogical theories that included race as a critical component. Through our sharing we discovered consistency in reactions to the presented material from White students, as well as students of color and identified similarities between the various challenges we confronted as we facilitated course sessions. In an effort to help each other develop a more successful praxis, we shared syllabi and strategies from our personal teaching experiences with one another. Our personal experiences in combination with the extant literature that included the experiences of other Black faculty who taught race-based subjects in education serve as the bases for the proposed model for developing a race pedagogy. What was evident from this analysis was an appreciation for the Black educators' positionality as both privileged and oppressed. The experience of race from the position of oppressor is vastly different from race experienced from the position of the oppressed. Black educators' simultaneous occupation of both spaces creates a pedagogical conundrum that presents a challenge unique to educators of color who teach race-based courses.

Other scholars have noted this unique space. Smith (2004) identified it as racial battle fatigue characterized by "the level of physiological, psychological, and emotional stress experienced by African American teachers who are assigned classes of predominantly White students who are, usually reluctantly, taking a course that is part of university diversity requirements" (p. 179). Because African American educators have a high likelihood of teaching race-based or race-related courses, these faculty regularly experience fatigue that is exacerbated by White student resistance (Perry et al. 2009), Black student expectations, and their own marginalization within the academy. Black faculty because of their positions of authority also experience privilege. They determine curriculum and give grades. They hold the power of inclusion and exclusion within their classrooms. They lay the foundation for student learning and as such are holders of power and privilege. These elements combine to create a perfect storm that requires intentionality and deliberateness in the approach to teaching undertaken by Black educators teaching about race and racism.

From our experiences and the experiences of other Black educators described in the literature, three dimensions with consequent decision points emerged. The decision points can fall anywhere on the three teaching strategy continuum identified by Perry et. al. (2009): anticipatory, depoliticizing, and disarming. Anticipatory teaching attempts to anticipate sources of student resistance and circumvent them through the self-introduction and curricular planning process. Depoliticizing seeks to deal indirectly with issues that race may surface. This may involve softening the language used and presenting the content in a less threatening manner. The final strategy posited is disarming which works toward avoiding confrontation and ensuring a safe but

open space at all cost.

The first dimension is authenticity of experience. This dimension falls most often in the arsenal of anticipatory teaching and involves the relationship of the Black educator to the racialized material. The educator may remain distant in an attempt to be objective. The educator may opt to identify with the material thus striking a subjective stance that advances legitimacy through lived and personal experiences. Conversely, this latter decision may result in the educator of color being objectified as "the other" by the learners. That is, only seen by the marker of racial identity and evaluated based on the learners understanding and feelings about that racial grouping. Appreciating the importance of effectively leveraging personal race-based experiences is a decision point.   It can be used to confirm objective ("fact based"), historical content, as well as counter-narrative to illuminate essential aspects of the material.

The second dimension is authority of whiteness in contradiction to the delegitimization of blackness. Curricular decision-making always involves decisions about content but such determinations are laced with political overtures. Decisions within the teaching and learning interaction are never neutral. They must be purposed. This purposing aligns this dimension with the depoliticizing strategy. A clear example of this involves reading material. Selecting is a political act. For example Black educators must be aware of authorship and be intentional in making choices. No mention of the racial identity of the author may act as a mask of neutrality and a suggestion that the content to be conveyed is value-free. Race-related material authored by a White scholar is deemed as objective and also value-neutral whereas racialized content presented by the racialized other is frequently charged as having an agenda. All decisions are carry inherent risk of undermining the course objectives. Blackness is often delegitimized resulting in the dismissal of anything associated with it. Whiteness is frequently viewed as a basis for authority which allows for less resistance to racially charged material but it occurs at the expense of invalidating Blackness. Selection of the "face" to put on course material becomes a pedagogical burden on Black educators that is not as salient for White faculty.

The third dimension presentation of self and style. While closely related to the first dimension, this dimension considers the affective demeanor of the educator and manner in which material is presented. Faculty who choose a transparent, intimate, and passionate demeanor may be received more favorably by the students but not be seen as authoritative. Faculty who opt for a robotic and sterile presentation by staying rooted in scholarship, and being passive in responding may be characterized as objective and more knowledgeable about the topic but lacking genuineness. Another presentation mode is one that entails challenging the learners. This mode may be construed as being confrontational and be accompanied by labels such as angry, biased and agenda toting. This style may lead to the value of the material being overlooked because it

may result in the learner becoming too defensive. Each self-presentation style can be effective but each can equally have the probability of being detrimental to the process of learning about race. Black educators need to be astute enough to "read" their audience and determine the best stylistic presentation of self and the material without compromising their sense of self in the process. This constant shifting and necessity for hyperawareness are contributors to racial battle fatigue.

Teaching is like an intricate dance. The creator is tasked with finding the right music, choreographing the moves, and determining the best way to help the dancers learn the dance. Multiple decisions are made at any given time with each impacting the succeeding one. Fortunately dancers do not have to develop artistic creations in a vacuum. Models exist to which they can refer for inspiration and direction. Faculty of color have few models. The analysis based our experiences and those located within the extant literature move us toward a model for Black faculty who teach race-based courses. Understanding the range of possible decision points within the dimensions of authenticity of experience, authority of whiteness, and presentation of self and style can serve as significant building blocks in the models. They move the educator away from being primarily content focused to being process focused. The foregrounding of process is essential. It allows for consideration of responses to the multilayered teaching-learning interaction.

Conclusion

Multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and anti-racist education offer important clues to the development of pedagogy of teaching race but often are more effective guides for educators who are White. While to varying degrees each addresses the complexity of race and racism, and each recognizes at some level how power dynamics permeate institutions and influence inter-personal relationships as well as intra-personal development, none provide adequate framing for the additional layer of complexity present when "the raced other" teaches about "the other". These power dynamics have the potential to mute the voice of the educator or amplify it. Many faculty of color have to strategically amplify their voices but find little direction in the literature for guiding their practice. A race pedagogy can help adult educators of color to be alert to the various dimensions that specifically influence their practice thus creating a pathway for a more successful teaching-learning interaction.

Racial overtones imbue the sociocultural and political environment in which Black educators practice. They are confronted with a plethora of pedagogical decisions to make when teaching courses about race. Each decision exists on a continuum. The key idea is that race pedagogy involves purposeful and deliberate planning around each decision point with the realization that White faculty may not be required to approach their praxis with the same level of attentiveness. Race pedagogy reminds Black educators to attend to the overtones and ultimately

provides a new and stronger voice for advancing racialized discourses in adult education classrooms.

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