What Should Preservice Teachers Know about Race and Diversity? Exploring a Critical Knowledge-Base for Teaching in 21st Century Canadian Classrooms

Benedicta Egbo
University of Windsor
begbo@uwindsor.ca

Abstract

Anecdotal and empirical evidence suggest that how teachers construct and interpret issues of race and diversity impacts significantly on their interactions with students from diverse backgrounds. At the same time, research shows that teacher education programs do not pay as much attention as would logically be expected given that many Canadian teachers will spend a good part of their career in racially and culturally heterogeneous settings. Conceptually grounded in critical race theory- a framework with increasing application in education, this paper explores the knowledge-base that preservice teachers require for successful teaching in a pluralistic society. A central argument in the paper is that a deep understanding of, and knowledge about race and diversity (beyond cursory familiarity) should be one of the required outcomes of preservice education.

Introduction

Nearly all stakeholders in education agree that diversity is, and will likely remain a stable feature of life in Canadian classrooms. This means that those who teach will have to learn ways of addressing the issue even before they become active practitioners in the profession. Such training is critical since research and anecdotal evidence suggest that while teachers often embrace ameliorative educational policies and programs in theory this support rarely manifests in practice (Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 1996). Paradoxically, many teachers will spend the bulk of their career in racially and culturally mixed educational environments (Egbo, 2009; Solomon et al., 2005; Sheets, 2005; Milner, 2003). While some teacher education curricula address diversity-related issues, there is little explicit discussion of race and how it is implicated in the outcomes of education for particular groups of students. Pollock (2001) has described this failure to seriously engage the issue of race in schooling as the suppression of the very question we most want to ask in education. Similarly, Lund & Carr (2010) have noted that "[r]acialized identities are problematic and highly contested notions, and the topic of racism is not usually addressed openly in polite company" (p. 231). Ironically, it seems logical to assume that given the unprecedented demographic shifts in wider society, deep understanding of the concepts of race and diversity, and the trajectories between both constructs and teaching and learning, should feature prominently in teacher education programs.

This paper explores a salient but often neglected area that all teacher educators and programs should engage with- the typology of knowledge about race and diversity that preservice teachers require for successful teaching in twenty-first century Canadian classrooms. The paper proceeds from the assumption that teachers' worldviews and belief systems have significant influence on their practice and subsequently, on their interactions with students. Indeed, this particular assumption foregrounds a common starting point in some foundation courses in teacher education programs- the identification of students' teaching/philosophy of education. The paper also assumes that if the resilience of racism and the delegitimization of the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) of students from some segments of society are to be disrupted, it is critical that as future frontline educators, preservice teachers develop a critical knowledge-base about race and diversity.

Theoretical Framework

The discussion in this paper is underpinned by critical race theory (henceforth CRT). Although CRT has its roots in critical legal studies, its application to education increased significantly following the publication of Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate's (1995) influential article *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education*. As an emergent paradigm for conceptualizing the trajectories between race and education, CRT acknowledges the centrality of race and focuses on how elements of racism and prejudice are embedded in society and social institutions such as schools. According to two of its ardent advocates, Solórzano & Yosso (2001, as cited in Milner, 2007, p. 390), CRT "challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups". With an emphasis on how race as a social construct is grossly under-theorized in analyses that purport to deconstruct the workings of society and social institutions (Omi & Winant, 1993), CRT is committed to social justice and to the elimination of all forms of inequalities especially those that are racially motivated.

With regards to educational knowledge, adherents of CRT argue that while race is commonly used to sustain inequality in schools and society, its "intellectual salience… has not been systematically employed in the analysis of educational inequality" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p.50; see also Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011). One question that is often asked within the Canadian context is whether or not race *really* matters. Many educational practitioners, scholars and researchers have engaged the issue arguing that the recognition of the salience of race is a *sine qua non* in any attempt at improving experiences and educational outcomes for racialized students in Canadian schools (see for example, Lund, 2011; Lund & Carr, 2010; McNeil, 2011; Schick, 2011; Carr, 2008; Dei et al., 2000). As Ghosh (2008) warns us, "[w]hile race does not have scientific validity, we must not underestimate its power as a social construct to affect people's lived experiences, their daily lives as well as their futures. Race is a very real concept in our social consciousness, and it has real world consequences" (p. 27). Similarly, Fleras and Elliott (2003) argue that even though Canadians are ambivalent about the concept, it will continue to matter in everyday life and public policy, "not because it is real, but because people respond as if it were real. Race matters not because people are inherently different or unequal, but because perceived differences may be manipulated as a basis for sorting out privilege and power" (p. 52). This

phenomenon is quite evident in the findings of a study on the determinants of the labour market outcomes for the children of immigrants in Canada and in the U.S. recently released by Statistics Canada (March, 2011) which show that while second generation immigrants may have discernible educational advantage, on average, Black Canadians earn less in the labour market than their White peers.

Even more worrisome, racism can be so pervasive in society that according to Tatum (1997) (as cited in Nieto & Bode, 2008) it becomes a persistent "smog in the air" which people cannot help but breathe in. This pervasiveness is indeed the nexus of the claims by proponents of CRT such as Milner (2007) who argues that:

> Race and racism are so ingrained in the fabric …of society that they become normalized. Individuals from various racial and ethnic backgrounds may find it difficult to even recognize the salience, permanence, effects, and outcomes of racism because race and racism are so deeply rooted and embedded in our ways and systems of knowing and experiencing life (p. 390).

The situation takes a somewhat more complicated turn in Canada where social attitude surveys tend to portray the image of a more racially inclusive society than for instance, the United States. This complexity according to Skerrett (2008) means that:

> [While] [t]he existence of racial and ethnocultural discrimination in Canada is most keenly perceived and experienced by visible minority groups and immigrant visible minorities, who make up one half of Canada's total immigrant population… census data that demonstrate inclusive social attitudes and practices in relation to diversity adds complexity to Canada's social landscape which ethnic minorities most strongly perceive as a vertical mosaic (p. 266).

This illusion of inclusion may be one of the reasons why despite increasing diversity among student populations in Canada, the teaching force remains predominantly homogeneous-White, middle class and monolingual. As a consequence, teachers and a significant number of their students view the world through lenses that sustain intractable difficulties that can only be resolved when a serious scrutiny of the role of race in reifying social injustice through education becomes an integral part of the discourse on Canadian diversity (Egbo, 2009; 2001; Ghosh, 2008; Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; James, 2003; Dei et. al., 2000, 1997).

Preservice Teachers, Ideology and Knowledge-Base

The reasons why teachers may be reluctant to embrace progressive policies and programs remain a matter of contention. However, most writers agree on at least two plausible reasons- teachers' ideological stance on issues that are related to race and diversity and, teachers' discomfort with engaging such "sensitive issues". Teachers' ideological stance includes the denial of racism in society and the belief that the individual is the sole determinant of his or her own school success even though this meritocratic ideology that fails to take into account how schools contribute to inequality in society has long been

discounted on empirical and practical grounds. In the same vein, the reluctance or refusal to engage the issue of race and diversity may be the result of an uncritical acceptance of the status quo. King (1991) refers to this tendency among teachers (and prospective teachers) especially those who have had little or no experience with people who are different from themselves, as dysconscious racism- a form of racism that tacitly accepts the norms and privileges of the dominant group based on "an *impaired* [emphasis in the original] consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness" (p. 135).

For the growing number of scholars and practitioners who have joined the clarion call for progressive changes in teacher education programs (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2000, 2005; Sheets, 2005; Milner, 2003, 2007; Solomon et al., 2005; McNeil, 2011), the rationale for such an appeal transcends the issue of increasing diversity among students although that is important in of itself. However, no less fundamental and important a reason is the need to re-conceptualize preservice teachers' knowledge-base since the ideological orientations of novice teachers can serve as barriers to adopting transformative practices. For example, research has shown that there is a tendency among preservice teachers towards interpreting cultural difference among students as a problem rather than a resource (Delpit, 2006). Moreover, cultural or racial differences are often grouped with other types of differences such as learning differences, intelligences, personality types etc (Levine-Rasky, 1998). While one must not minimize the importance of other indices of difference as integral aspects of diversity, differences involving race, culture and ethnicity require a different kind of knowledge-base that should be learned in training (Gay, 2000; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Milner, 2003).

In addition to perceiving differences as problematic, teacher candidates do not often understand the language, culture or the particular circumstances of their diverse students nor do they understand how some school-based problems and inequalities are historically, socially and politically constructed. Without a critical knowledge-base about race and diversity, this orientation towards orthodoxy means that preservice teachers will be less positioned to support and empower students from racialized backgrounds and may, indeed, attribute student underachievement where that is the case, to exclusively individual variables as Levine-Rasky (1998) asserts:

> it is prevalent amongst prospective teachers to persist in interpreting social difference and inequality through the lens of meritocracy in which success is directly related to individual achievement and talent irrespective of environmental or broader social factors such as racial discrimination, poverty unequal treatment in public institutions language barriers and other patterns of oppression" (pp. 90, 91).

 Other researchers share Levine-Rasky's assertions that prospective teacher candidates typically adhere to conservative ideologies (Carr and Klassen, 1997; Solomon et al., 2005). For example, a study by Solomon et al. (2005) which investigated teacher candidates' perceptions of, and understanding of "Whiteness" and White privilege in Canadian society, found that candidates from different racial and cultural backgrounds have different perceptions of oppression and White privilege. Through a discourse analysis of students'

responses to Peggy McIntosh's (1990) well known piece, *White Privilege* which unmasks the privileges that accrue to members of the dominant group, the researchers found a general tendency towards the denial of such privileges by candidates from dominant group backgrounds. People do indeed see and interpret social phenomena through lenses that are tinted by their social positioning. However, a dysconscious acceptance of the status quo exposes a far greater problem- an ideological stance that is based on taken-for-granted assumptions about power relations in society as well as limited familiarity with the burgeoning literature that points to the role of privilege in educational success.

Beyond orthodoxy, the denial of the possession of privilege and the uncritical acceptance of the status quo may also be associated with feelings of guilt among preservice students vis à vis racism and discrimination. The following journal entry by an undergraduate student in an education course (quoted in King, 1991) exemplifies the kind of guilt that some White preservice students experience when the issue of race is discussed in class:

> With some class discussions, readings and other media, there have been times that I feel guilty for being White which really infuriates me because no one should feel guilty for the color of their skin or ethnic background. Perhaps my feelings are actually a discomfort for the fact that others have been discriminated against all of their life [sic] because of their color and I have not (p. 136).

No one should, of course, be made to feel guilty about their own identity. However, this discomfort (ideological or psychological) may be a contributing factor to why the issue of race and diversity is not given the discursive space it warrants in teacher education programs which in turn, limits preservice teachers' future potential to challenge undesirable educational policies and practices.

Towards A Transformative Knowledge-Base

So what should teacher candidates know about race and diversity for successful teaching in diverse contexts? In her discussion of strategies for teacher development and educational reform, Cochran-Smith (2005) calls for a grounded theory of teacher education for social change that:

> Has the potential to help all teachers prepare students to live productive and ethical lives in an increasingly divers society, to work actively for equity and against racism, and to contribute to a more just society…. [A] theory of teacher education for social change that begins with the premise that teaching and teacher education are political and intellectual as well as practical activities that occur within complex historical, economic and social contexts (pp. 247, 248).

Towards this objective, Cochran-Smith identifies four critical questions that should guide policy makers in enacting progressive teacher education programs. These include 1) questions related to the kind of knowledge and interpretive frameworks that inform the work

of progressive novice and seasoned teachers, 2) the ideological and political underpinnings of the work of novice and veteran teachers 3) the constituents of the pedagogy and practice of teachers who teach for social change and 4) questions related to the characteristics of preservice and in-service teacher education programs and professional development respectively. In Cochran-Smith's account, what is needed in teacher education is a critical theory that is mindful of the trajectories between the structural, macro and micro level variables that impinge on educational success.

Like Cochran-Smith (2005) other writers (e.g., Nieto & Bode, 2008; Bennett, 2007; Sheets, 2005; Milner, 2003; Gay, 2000, hooks, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994) have in different but, coalescing ways, identified several diversity-oriented competency areas on which teacher education programs ought to focus. I broadly categorize these as follows: understanding the teaching-self, racial and cultural literacy, critical pedagogical practices, and competencies for conducting fair assessments. It should be noted here that I am not de-emphasizing the immense importance of the "regular" teacher education curriculum that is required for certification and licensure. Rather, I am advocating the broadening of the scope of the curriculum to include in deeply profound ways, the issue of race and diversity beyond a tokenistic platform. A starting point for authentic diversity-cognizant teacher education program involves helping preservice teachers to understand who they are as educators.

Understanding the "Teaching Self"

Understanding the teaching self involves a process of autobiographical analysis that should enable teachers, (new and experienced) to understand how their personal histories may intersect with their teaching practices. Such scrutiny is warranted by the very fact that we all grow up in cultural environments that promote the rationality and superiority of our own worldviews over those of others. It is therefore not unreasonable to expect that in order to empower others, educators must first understand who they are as well as the values and beliefs that inform their practices. Ladson-Billings (2006) summarises the link between teachers' beliefs and their practices:

> Teachers who believe that society is fair and just believe that their students are participating on a level playing field and simply have to learn to be better competitors than other students. They also believe in a kind of social Darwinism that supports the survival of the fittest. …Teachers who … [are] *culturally relevant* assume that an asymmetrical (even antagonistic) relationship exists between poor students of color and society. Thus, their vision of their work is one of preparing students to combat inequity by being highly competent and critically conscious (p. 30).

Unfortunately, while educators often ask questions regarding what to teach and how to teach it, they hardly ever inquire about who the 'teaching self' is (Palmer, 1998; Irving, 2006). Seeing things through different lenses is a powerful precursor for developing new understandings and better ways of doing things in the classroom. Furthermore, an analysis of the teaching self helps teachers to understand that by virtue of their privileged position, they

have considerable power over their students. A critical self-analysis should enable teachers to better understand the intersectionality of a complex amalgam of individual, social and institutional variables that affect educational outcomes for many students especially those from racialized backgrounds.

Cranton (1994) outlines the precursors of educator self-development and transformation as follows: "[t]he educator, in order to develop the meaning perspective of *being an educator* would: increase self-awareness through consciousness-raising activities, make his or her assumptions and beliefs about practice explicit, engage in critical reflection on those assumptions and beliefs, engage in dialogue with others and develop an informed theory of practice" (p. 214). Milner (2003, p. 205) suggests several critical questions that preservice teachers should ask themselves as they expand their knowledge of the link between the teaching-self and race:

- How will my race influence my work as a teacher with students of colour?
- How do I, as a teacher, situate myself in the education of others, and how do I negotiate the power structure in my class to allow students to feel a sense of worth?
- How do I situate and negotiate students' knowledge, experiences, expertise, and race with my own?
- What are the most important issues for most of my students and myself? How will race impact on these issues?
- To what degree is my role as teacher and my experiences superior to the experiences and expertise of students?
- What knowledge can I learn from my students?

In effect, understanding the teaching-self involves becoming aware or developing critical consciousness which should result in paradigm shifts. In addition to providing a foundational guide for critical self-analysis, Milner's questions highlight the need for infusing racial and cultural literacy across teacher education curricula.

Racial and Cultural Literacy

Also described as racial and cross-cultural competence (Banks, 2001), racial and cultural literacy should be a critical component of educating teachers in pluralistic societies like Canada. Anecdotal and empirical evidence especially from the U.S. has shown that how teachers construct and interpret issues of race and diversity is linked to their perceptions and differential treatment of "other peoples' children" (Delpit, 2006; Howard, 2006; McLaren, 2007; Milner, 2003; hooks, 1994, 2003; Paley, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2006;). At the same time, the educational success of diverse students depends on teachers' willingness and ability to empower them which in turn, rests on their perceptions of students and their communities (Cummins, 2000; Dei, et al., 2000; Delpit, 2006). It therefore stands to reason as Milner (2003) points out, that successful teaching in pluralistic societies requires that teachers become racially and cross-culturally competent since these often provide particular challenges to those who teach students that are different from themselves. For Milner:

> [r]ace is such a significant dimension of all human beings' experiences, especially racially marginalized individuals' daily activities, that it seems

inconceivable that teacher educators even consider preparing pre-service teachers to reflect without explicit dialogue … strategies, and techniques that address race (p.196).

This point is crucial since research evidence suggests that teachers often do not consider race and diversity-related issues priority areas even during their training (Solomon et al., 2005). Research also show that teachers' orientation to race, diversity, social justice, equity and inclusion more generally, can serve as powerful stimulus to the successful implementation of progressive and inclusive educational policies (Howard, 2006; Cochran-Smith, 2005). For example, teachers who are well versed in multicultural issues would be better positioned to respond positively to student diversity.

In her critically acclaimed book in which she analyzes the interplay between race, ethnicity and teaching and learning, Lisa Delpit (2006) argues that teachers can positively transform the lives of racialized children if they dispensed with prejudice, stereotypes, and cultural assumptions that are in fact the consequence of miscommunications and miscues when primarily White educators teach children who are racially and culturally different from themselves. This is not only the practical thing to do she argues, it is the socially and morally just approach to educating all children. What Delpit is arguing for is both racial and cultural literacy which should, for all practical purposes, be non-negotiable components of progressive teacher education programs.

Racial and cultural literacy also involve learning critical discourse norms which in this context, refers to the ability to use language critically (Banks, 2001). It is important for teachers to always remember that while it is easy to eliminate the most obvious biased language, sometimes the most offensive language and words are those that are ostensibly neutral and therefore, latent. Take for instance the innocuous phrase "these people" which is commonly used in wider society. In certain contexts, it serves as the manifest evidence of binary and dichotomizing thinking that creates a culture of "us" and "them" with the implicit suggestion of the superiority of the speaker. For instance, it is common practice in Canada to refer to First Nations Peoples, new immigrants and other non-dominant group members as "these people" in ways that are oblivious to the implicit attitude of condescension the phrase embodies. Moreover, as Allgood (2001) points out, it is inappropriate to talk about any group of persons in ways that imply that they collectively have such shared characteristics.

Critical Pedagogical Practices

There are some who hold the view that teaching is a neutral activity. This is an illusory assumption since teaching is deeply intertwined with the existing political and social order as Seddon (as cited in Connell 1993) argues:

Teachers' work which involves conscious and unconscious processes and effects, is both shaped within, and in turn shapes, relations of power. Teachers' practice in economic and cultural production creates asymmetries in individuals' and groups' capacities to define and realise their needs. Teachers' work is therefore also political action because, consciously or unconsciously, it serves to confirm or context the prevailing social order (p.70).

Villegas & Lucas (2002) provide two contrasting views of teachers and teaching that have direct bearing on how teachers approach their practices. According to the authors, at one end of the continuum is the view that sees teaching as an apolitical activity and teachers as technicians whose primary function is to "use accepted and proven means to impart knowledge and skills prescribed by the curriculum, which is designed by experts and selected administrators and policy makers, none of whom work in the classroom" (p. 55). Viewed from this perspective, it is quite logical to think of schools as socializing agencies that are charged with producing an uncritical citizenry. In contrast to the view of teaching as a neutral activity, Villegas and Lucas suggest that at the other end of the other continuum are beliefs that see teachers as agents of change whose practices are firmly grounded in transformative pedagogies. An example of such transformative framework which preservice students should be taught to embrace, is critical pedagogy which has to do with the critique, interrogation and challenge of educational orthodoxies that privilege certain kinds of knowledge over others (Kincheloe, 2005). With an emphasis on how knowledge is constructed, situated and contested within the context of power and marginality, critical pedagogists interrogate and challenge educational practices that privilege certain kinds of knowledge while devaluing others. This culture of knowledge devaluation is however not immutable (Egbo, 2009). Critical pedagogists believe that if schools subordinate some groups of students and their ways of knowing, they also hold the potential for change through just and inclusive practices that affirm all forms of diversity including those that are race and culture-based not the least of which are assessment practices.

Competencies for Fair Assessment Practices

Although not often perceived as such, assessment and diversity are interconnected in very important ways. First, assessment practices can promote or hinder social justice or anti-oppression education (Kelly & Brandes, 2008). Second, as constructivists have long argued, students learn and construct meaning differently; it seems logical that approaches to assessment and evaluation should be cognizant of student diversity. Third, cultural and linguistic factors have significant impact on the outcomes of assessment and, not all assessment tools are reliable across the board for all students. Indeed, schools often ignore this fact- no assessment tool especially test-based traditional variants will achieve the same result across all ethnic or cultural groups (Corson, 2001).

As a consequence of this incongruence, certain kinds of assessments have been indicted as being favourably skewed towards students from dominant group backgrounds. Indeed, it is now a well established fact that standardized tests tend to be culturally biased especially in demographically heterogeneous societies like Canada. A case in point. IQ tests which were once the gold standard for assessing intelligence are now deemed to be culturally biased because they only measure indices of intelligence that have been selectively identified from the point of view of the dominant culture. Another example; several Canadian studies have documented biases in placement tests among language minority students especially by psychologists who lack the knowledge-base or cultural competence to assess such students (Corson, 2001).

Unfortunately, standardized and other school-based tests continue to be used as the basis for sorting and segregating students, especially students who come from racially, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Sheets, 2005; Nieto, 2002; Froese-Germain, 1999). Perhaps even more worrisome, some of the standardized assessment tools that teachers use are developed from the perspective of the "standard" student which is codified language for students from dominant group background. It is important to remember as Froese-Germain (1999, p. 6) points out that while "tests maybe standardized, …students are not". One question that needs to be addressed is why unjust assessment practices persist in schools. Studies have explored and identified barriers that prevent teachers from adopting socially just approaches to student assessment. In one example that examined the link between teaching for social justice and classroom assessment practices (Kelly & Brandes, 2008) the researchers found that even teachers who desire to enact equitable assessment strategies are constrained by structural factors that include,   "standardized tests… textbooks that perpetuate existing stereotypes and suppress discussion of conflicts; teachers' lack of pedagogical knowledge to challenge the official curriculum; *inadequate teacher education* [my emphasis]; and the power of parent groups with vested interests in maintaining the status quo" (p. 57). While arguably some of these constraints are beyond the scope of the mandate of teacher educators, some can nevertheless, be addressed in particular and detailed ways in teacher apprenticeship programs. At the very least, preservice teachers must understand the need for adopting authentic approaches to assessment that have written, verbal and performance components in order to accommodate preferred learning styles, differential linguistic and communicative competence, as well as cultural backgrounds. That being said, it is important to bear in mind that using a variety of strategies to assess student learning in culturally diverse contexts, does not imply replacing cognitively challenging tasks with less rigorous ones.

Engaging the "Discourse" of Silence

As mentioned earlier, preservice students often experience discomfort when class discussions centre on the discourse of race, racism, oppression, domination, marginalization and colonialism (Solomon et al., 2005; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Despite this discomfort, teacher education programs should engage in what Cochran-Smith (2005) refers to as "hard talk" which involves "a serious consideration of diversity, race and racism, and schooling from multiple, critical, personal and professional perspectives" (p. 270). Cochran-Smith further argues that the purpose of hard talk is not to arrive at a consensus but rather, to allow multiple voices and perspectives to challenge the status quo as well as to emphasize the need for social transformation through education. Some teacher educators address the issue head-on despite students' initial disinterest. For example, Milner (2006) provides a narrative of his successful effort (through a study of his own class) in getting students to engage with as well as reflect on the issue of race despite their initial resistance. According to Milner, the course expanded the students' knowledge and awareness of diversity so profoundly that it prompted comments such as the following from them:

> The articles [in the course] brought to my attention issues that I did not know existed. The hard part about the articles was trying to change the view I have

had my entire life. I am trying to see diversity issues that obviously exist in my classroom that I am unaware of for the most part (pp. 354-355).

[The course] kind of opened my eyes. Some of the things we talked about kind of opened my eyes, and I started looking for things… looking for types of relationships between kids of different races or looking at how people treat each other and how people treat people of different races (p.355).

It is safe to argue that preservice students who are able to engage the issue of race will likely continue to do so as in-service teachers. Without proper training, even well-meaning teachers remain silent about race and diversity citing instead, "colour blindness" as the ultimate evidence of their aversion to racism and social injustices (Egbo, 2009; Henry & Tator, 2006; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). As Nieto and Bode (2008) put it:

Well-intentioned teachers are sometimes unintentionally discriminatory when they remain silent about race and racism. They may fear that talking about race will only exacerbate the problem of racism. As a consequence, most schools are characterized by a curious absence of talk about differences, particularly about race. Such silences about racism are sometimes thought to be appropriate because they demonstrate that teachers are "colour-blind," that is fair and impartial when it comes to judging people based on their race (pp. 74-75).

Such teachers often make claims like "I do not see colour"; "I love all my students"; "I treat everyone equally" or "as far as I am concerned, everyone is the same" (Egbo, 2009 p. 11). While these claims are obviously well intentioned, they are practically unrealistic since race is often the first thing we tend to notice about people especially in racialized societies. Moreover, it is literally impossible not to notice racial differences amongst students in the closed confines of a classroom. Indeed, such claims ought to be regarded as a negation of the identities of individual students. Even if for the sake of argument one concedes that some people are less prone to "noticing race" than others, the problem with testimonials asserting colour-blindness is rather obvious. Even in culturally homogenous educational contexts, remaining oblivious to differences among students is clearly impossible and in some instances may be akin to bad teaching. It is therefore misleading to claim that every student can be treated equally since there are significant individual differences such as preferred learning styles (Gardner, 1999), abilities, disabilities, cultural differences as well as personal circumstances that warrant differential treatment if teachers are to effectively meet the learning needs of all their students. The point I am making here is that teachers should not be oblivious to racial diversity among their students. However, preservice students should understand the importance of engaging such differences in ways that disrupt the culture of silence while simultaneously avoiding stereotyping, lowered expectations and unfair treatment of particular groups of students.

Conclusion

The main thrust of the discussion in this paper has been that there is a dire need for a corresponding change in teacher education programs relative to increasing diversity among Canada's student populations. While this concordance must be cognizant of the basic requirements for successful teaching, teacher candidates do, however, need deeper understandings of the intersectionality of race and diversity on the one hand, and schooling on the other through learned and expanded knowledge about both social constructs. Crucially, such understanding will, in all likelihood, precipitate consciousness-raising and subsequent interrogation of the existing social order. When teachers (including teacher candidates) begin to ask critical questions   about social structures, social spaces, structural/educational forces and racial injustices, they become important advocates for their students as well as agents of change. As has been suggested throughout the paper, teacher agency is a prerequisite condition for transcending everyday technical responsibilities in order to initiate critical transformative action. Finally, it is worth emphasizing that while teachers may have limited opportunities to influence macro-level policies, they can, however, create environments that foster positive educational outcomes for all students especially those from racialized backgrounds. Empowering teachers to become agents of change should begin during their apprenticeship.

References

Allgood, I. (2001). The role of the school in deterring prejudice. In C. Diaz (ed.), *multicultural education in the 21ˢᵗ century, (pp. 184-207).* New York: Addison Wesley Longman.

Banks, C.A.M. (2001). Becoming a cross-cultural teacher. In C. Diaz (Ed.), *multicultural education in the 21st century* (pp. 171-183). New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers.

Bennett, C. I. (2007). *Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory and Practice*, (6ᵗʰ ed.), Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Carr, P. R. (2008). The "Equity Waltz" in Canada: Whiteness and the informal realities of racism in education. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education, 3*(2), 4-23. Retrieved from: http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/JCIE

Carr, P. & Klassen, T. (1997). Different perceptions of race in education: Racial minority and white teachers. *Canadian Journal of Education, 22*, 67-81.

Cochran-Smith, M. (2000). Blind vision: Unlearning racism in teacher education. *Harvard Educational Review, 70,* 157-190.

Cochran-Smith, M. (2005). Teacher development and educational reform. In M. Fullan (Ed), *Fundamental change: International handbook on educational change*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Connell, R. W. (1993). *Schools and social justice.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press

Corson, D. (2001). *Language diversity and education*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum Associates.

Cranton, P. (1994). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults.* San Francisco: Jossey –Bass.

Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon (UK): Multilingual Matters.

Dei, G.J.S., James, I.M., Karumanchery, L.L., James-Wilson, S. and Zine, J. (2000). *Removing the margins: The challenges and possibilities of inclusive schooling*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Dei, G.J.S., Mazzuca, J., McIsaac, E., and Zine, J. (1997). *Reconstructing dropout: A critical ethnography of the dynamics of Black students' disengagement from school*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.

Egbo, B. (2001). Differential enunciation, mainstream language and the education of immigrant minority students: Implications for policy and practice. *Journal of Teaching and Learning, 1*(2), 47-61.

Egbo, B. (2009). *Teaching for diversity in Canadian schools.* Toronto: Pearson Education.

Fleras, A., & Elliot, J.L. (2003). *Unequal relations: An introduction to race and ethnic dynamics in Canada (4ᵗʰ ed.)*. Toronto, ON: Prentice-Hall.

Froese-Germain, B. (1999). *Standardized Testing: Undermining Equity in Education*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Teachers' Federation.

Gardner, H. (1999). Intelligence *reframed: Multiple intelligences for the 21ˢᵗ century*. New York: Basic Books.

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research & practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Ghosh, R. (2008). Racism: A hidden curriculum. *Education Canada*, *48* (4), 26-29.

Ghosh, R., & Abdi, A. (2004). *Education and the politics of difference: Canadian perspective*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Henry, F., & Tator, C. (2006). *The color of democracy: Racism in Canadian society*. Toronto, ON: Thompson & Nelson.

hooks, bell. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress*. New York: Routledge.

hooks, bell. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York: Routledge.

Howard, G. R. (2006). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teacher, multiracial schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Irvine, M. (2006). Practicing what we teach: Experiences with reflective practice and critical engagement. In J. Landsman & C. W. Lewis (Eds.), *White teachers/diverse classrooms: A guide to building inclusive schools, promoting high expectations, and eliminating racism*. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

James, C.E. (2003). *Seeing ourselves: Exploring race, ethnicity and culture*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing.

Kelly, D. M. & Brandes, G. M. (2008). Equitable classroom assessment: Promoting self-development and self-determination. *Interchange, 39* (1), 49-76.

Kincheloe, J. L. (2005). *Critical pedagogy primer*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

King, J.E. (1991). Dysconscious racism: Ideology, identity, and the miseducation of teachers. *The Journal of Negro Education, 60* (2), 133-146.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Ladson-Billings, G. & Tate, W. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97* (1), 47-67.

Ladson-Billings (2006). Introduction. In G. Ladson-Billings & W. F. Tate (Eds.), *Education Research in the Public Interest: Social Justice, Action, and Policy* (pp.1-13). New York: Teachers College Press.

Levine-Rasky, C. (1998). Pre-service teacher education and the negotiation of social difference. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 9*(1), 89-112.

Lund, D. E. (2011). Examining shades of grey with Students: Social justice education in action, *Journal of Praxis in Multicultural Education* 6(1), pp.79-91. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.library.unlv.edu/jpme/vol6/iss1/9

Lund, D. E. & Carr, P. R (2010). Exposing privilege and racism in *the great White north*: Tackling Whiteness and identity issues in Canadian education, *Multicultural Perspectives*, *12* (40), 229-234.

McIntosh, P. (1990). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Independent School*, Winter, 31-36.

McLaren, P. (2007). *Life in Schools. An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

McNeil, B. (2011). Charting a way Forward: Intersections of race and space in establishing identity as an African-Canadian teacher educator. *Studying Teacher Education*, 7 (2), 133-143.

Milner, H. (2003). Reflection, racial competence and critical pedagogy: How do we prepare pre-service teachers to pose tough questions? *Race, Ethnicity and Education*. 6 (2), 193-208.

Milner, H. (2006). Preservice teachers' learning about cultural and racial diversity: Implications for urban education. *Urban Education*, *41*(4), 343-375.

Milner, H. (2007). Race, narrative inquiry, and self-study in curriculum and teacher education. *Education and Urban Society*, *39* (4), 584-609.

Nieto, S. and Bode, P. (2008). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (5th ed.) Boston: Pearson Education.

Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1993). On the theoretical concept of race. In C. McCarthy and W. Crichlow (Eds), *Race identity and representation in education* (pp.3-10). New York, NY: Routledge.

Paley, V.G. (2000). *White teacher.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Palmer, P.J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Pollock, M. (2001). How the question we ask most about race in education is the very question we most suppress. *Educational Researcher*, *30*(9), 2-12.

Schick, C. (2011), Policy as performance: Tracing the rituals of racism, *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, *33*(5), 465-483.

Sheets, R H. (2005). *Diversity pedagogy: Examining the role of culture in the teaching-learning process*. Toronto: Pearson Education.

Skerrett, A. (2008). Racializing educational change: Melting pot and mosaic influences on educational policy. *Journal of Educational of Change, 9*, 261- 280.

Solomon, R.P., & Levine-Rasky, C. (1996). When principle meets practice: Teachers' contradictory responses to anti-racist education. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, *42*(1), 19-33.

Solomon, R.P., Portelli, J.P., Daniel, B.J. & Campbell, A. (2005). The Discourse of denial: How White teacher candidates construct race, racism, and "White privilege". *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8*(2), 147-169.

Statistics Canada (2011). Seeking success in Canada and the United States: The determinants of labour market outcomes among the children of immigrants. Retrieved from http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2011331-eng.htm

Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. 2002. *Educating culturally responsive teachers: A coherent approach*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Zamudio, M. Russell, C., Rios, F. & Bridgeman, J. (2011). *Critical race theory matters: Education & ideology*. New York: Routledge.