REFLECTIONS ON MY WHITE PRIVILEGE AND UNDERSTANDING IT: THOUGHTS FROM A TEACHER EDUCATOR

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Abstract

The topic of White Privilege continually appears in a variety of contexts. As one of those contexts is teacher education, the author reflects on how he came to understand his White Privilege in this article. To frame his reflection, the author first unpacks the term "White Privilege" by drawing from other scholarly works and then explains how he came to understand its meaning. The author put forward his reflections as a way of sharing his experiences, in hopes they may help other White educators become aware of their own White Privilege and begin living socially conscious lives.

Reflections on My White Privilege and Understanding It: Thoughts from a Teacher Educator

A topic that does not get deeply addressed in many teacher education programs is White Privilege (WP). Yes, many teacher education programs include courses, units, and lessons about diversity. However, so often those "plunges into diversity" focus outwardly on diversity, which leads to teacher candidates not gaining a deep understanding of what it means to be a multicultural teacher and then brining that understanding into their future classroom (Laughter, 2011). With the majority of pre-service teachers coming from a White, middle-class upbringing (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006; U.S. Department of Education & National Center for Education Statistics, 2014), these opportunities to engage diversity lend themselves to diversity being viewed as a phenomenon that is something outside, apart, and separate from their human experience (Ladson-Billings & Gillborn, 2004). WP, however, is something that is not outside, apart, or separate from their human experience. Rather, it is something most White pre-service teachers are unaware of, even though they likely benefit from it on a daily basis (Jensen, 1998; McIntosh, 1998). Moreover, when they are made aware of it, these pre-service teachers tend to deny, balk, feel guilt, or become offended and uncomfortable when their privilege is pointed out to them (DiAngelo, 2010; Wells, 2008).

As this issue of *The Catalyst* is focused on social justice in education, I deeply believe a central tenet of this topic is for pre-service teachers to understand their WP and what it means (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). Moreover, bringing White pre-service teachers into understanding their WP is something that must be done in a way, so they realize their privilege and do not reject its existence. This understanding is crucial because it is the first step towards White individuals living a socially conscious lifestyle (Jones, Rowan-Kenyon, Ireland, Niehaus, & Skendall, 2012; Kiely, 2004), which means engaging in political activities to bring awareness about societal inequalities that affect the poor and minorities. In this spirit, I am going to share my reflections of how I came to understand my WP and what I do because of it in an effort to support other teachers, teacher educators, and pre-service teachers in discovering and realizing their own WP.

Conceptualizing White Privilege

To ground my conversation, I will first offer readers some published definitions in order to build a common understanding of WP. In her seminal paper "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," McIntosh (1989) wrote that "White Privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks" (p. 95). To McIntosh, she understands WP to be the gifts and benefits she has been given based on only the color of her skin, not by any accomplishments she has earned. In this way, WP is bestowed on White individuals almost as a birthright. About WP, Donnelly, Cook, Van Ausdale, and Foley (2005) described it as:

> Similar to breathing, White Privilege is an unconscious and unthinking process. Thus, most Whites are reluctant to acknowledge the privileges attached to Whiteness and the discrimination that results from it. Blatant prejudice and racism are seen as individual maliciousness and can be easily condemned, but acknowledging White Privilege means admitting complicity and taking action against a whole social system that privileges Whites over people of color. (p. 8)

In their description of WP, Donnelly et al. reflect the sentiments of Charles Hamilton and Kwame Ture (1967), two influential Civil Rights activists, when they described individual racism and compared it to institutional racism. Individual racism are overt acts of racism that include hate groups burning down Black churches and majority individuals using the language of hatred when referring to minority groups. These acts are easily observed and quickly condemned by society. However, institutional racism is a much subtler form of racism, and two examples of it are the rates at which Black-owned businesses compared to White-owned businesses are given startup loans (Bates, 2000) and the length of prison sentences given to Blacks and Whites who commit the same crime and are tried in the same district court (Mustard, 2001). Both of those examples are forms of institutionalized racism, and WP falls into this category. To further explain it, Pulido (2000) states that "White Privilege is… an attempt to name a social system that works to the benefits of whites. White Privilege, together with overt and institutionalized racism, reveals how racism shapes places" (p. 13). Pulido's description of WP aligns with institutional racism, and she writes about environmental racism in Southern California to exemplify her argument. In brief, Pulido contends that WP is at play when government institutions decide where pollution centers will be located. According to Pulido's evidence, pollution centers are located in non-White residential areas because the policies and politicians who decide where to locate these pollution centers are slanted in favor of Whites. In this way, Whites enjoy a privilege granted to them based on racist, institutionalized practices. As Donnelly et al. (2005) pointed out, it is easy to identify blatant, individual acts of racism; however, it is challenging for Whites to admit the benefits they are afforded because of their skin color, and it is even less likely they will take action against a system that affords them such privilege. The Whites in Pulido's (2000) article are not likely to argue for a change in policy so a pollution center is placed in their community, and those Whites are subsequently enjoying their WP. With this in mind, the questions then becomes are Whites aware of their privilege and what can be done to make them aware of their privilege? In the remainder of this paper, I will share my experiences of how I learned to recognize my WP and work to bring awareness to change the social system that privileged me.

Coming Into Understanding My White Privilege

I was raised in a suburb of Orlando and attended mostly White elementary and middle schools. I do not recall one Black or Hispanic child who attended my elementary school, and only Black child who attended my middle school. The high school I attended was also mostly White,

but it was slightly more diverse because of busing policies. On average, I had two Black students in each of my classes. I recall socializing with my Black classmates, and I had Black football and lacrosse teammates. We were "school" friends, but never of the close-knit variety. Upon high school graduation, I attended college and had only one Black fraternity brother and one Black rugby teammate. Again, I socialized with them, but we were not close-knit. Furthermore, the universities I attended where not overly diverse. The majority of students were White and I do no recall any Black or Hispanic student in my literature or education courses. In fact, it was not until I graduated from college and took my first teaching job that I began to understand diversity.

My First Thoughts About White Privilege

My first teaching job was at Leavesburg High School (LHS) (pseudonym), an urban school in a rural community north of Orlando. Although I worked in a large county that contained many farming communities, LHS was located in an older, poorer part of a downtown strip, which is how it acquired its "urban" label, and LHS had a negative reputation in the community. On my first day of my teaching career, I recall standing in front of my students, and the majority of them were White students, with Black and Hispanic students comprising about 33%. I remember trying to take attendance and mispronouncing many students' names. I remember thinking how dissimilar the schools I attended and the schools where I completed my student teaching were. I remember trying to connect with my students by rapping a line out of a then popular Ja Rule song, and the students laughed at me and called me "White." I found this humorous because I was White, but I still thought I sounded okay. Plus, my teacher education program had trained, not taught, me to make connections with my students' culture, which I was trying to do through music. As the first weeks of the school year passed, my classes and I began to fall into our routine, but I started to notice little nuances of WP.

Being an English teacher, I was responsible for teaching "literature" to my students, and this responsibility was the first moment when I started thinking about diversity, my students, and my subject matter. To be blunt, I do not believe in teaching canonical texts and I think those texts reduce literature to a static list of novels (Applebee, 1989). I do believe that matching my students to the text is paramount. The problem I faced, however, was that the literature in my Prentice Hall literature anthology in no way spoke to the diversity of my students. Yes, universal themes exist, but I did not understand why my students had to read Tolstoy's *How Much Land Does a Man Need?* to understand the dangers of greed. That theme can be found in a variety of contemporary young adult novels, songs, movies, and articles, none of which appeared in our literature anthology. Undaunted, my students read about greed as experienced in 19th century Russia by Putnam, and they memorized the information they needed to pass whatever test I gave them. However, they did not connect with the story. Being frustrated with this result and inexperienced but knowing something was wrong with the mismatch between the literature in the anthology and my students' demographics, I simply asked, "What do you want to read? Look in the table of contents and tell me." It turns out, that was the best question I could have asked. In response, my students turned to the table of contents and began reviewing the works. After a few unnerving moments, Teena (pseudonym), a student of mine who was adopted and of Jamaican descent, said, "How about we read Jamaica Kincaid?" I remember thinking that she picked Kincaid because of her name, but I went with it. I told the class that tomorrow we would read Kincaid's excerpt (the excerpt was "A Walk to the Jetty" from her novel *Annie John*), and the class seemed excited. In that moment was when I realized that WP provides a safe haven of literature for Whites to feel secure studying. The authors are White, were educated because they did not have to overcome racial boundaries, and likely had an easier time getting published just on the basis of their skin color. Those elements, which were compounded over centuries, then combine so White authors comprise the majority of authors taught in high schools English courses, which creates challenges for teaching multicultural texts (Agee, 2004). During my undergraduate days, we talked about

these concerns, but we did not discuss what it meant to students, only that it was it existed. It took me standing in front of my class that day and having my students look through the table of contents to realize what an author's race meant to them. The next day, true to my word, I came in and taught Kincaid's piece. Although I still had first-year teacher challenges, I noticed that my students, all of my students, were more interested in Kincaid than they were in Tolstoy.

I shared that moment because it was the first time in my teaching career where I remember I did something about WP. At that point, I did not have the words, knowledge, or understanding about what I did. Rather, I just had an inclination that something was not quite right and something should be done. Perhaps it was my own exasperation for how my students (dis)engaged Tolstoy's story, but in reflection, I think it was something more. It was that I did not want to force my students into reading texts written by canonical authors (code for "dead, White males"). I wanted them to make personal connections, and Kincaid's text allowed that to happen. To this day, I am thankful to Teena for bravely suggesting that we read Kincaid. That one comment changed me. After I completed my first two years in the classroom and having been armed with some experience, I returned to school to earn my masters of education (M.Ed.).

To me, the difference between my experiences as an undergraduate and graduate student is the type of motivation I possessed as a student. When I was an undergraduate, I wanted to enjoy college and eventually earn a degree in teaching. As a graduate student, I wanted knowledge that I could use. I sought meaning from the bit of experience I had attained; I wanted to make sense of it, and I sought some advanced teaching methods to use in my classroom. To my dismay, I acquired little of both.

My Formal Introduction to White Privilege

The first time I was formally introduced to the topic of WP, I was earning my M.Ed., and I was taking a class in curriculum and instruction taught by a freshly minted Ph.D. My professor, Dr. Jonalle (pseudonym), was a White woman in her mid-30s, and she was married to a man from Africa. In class, she explained that she met her husband while working in African schools, and he was a Black man. At first, I did not think anything peculiar about an interracial marriage. It seemed reasonable to me that someone who was working in Africa and was of my professor's age would find a suitable partner, and I personally had no reason to think negatively about interracial marriages. I have always take a Libertarian stance that individuals can do as they please as long as it is within reason and does not harm anyone else (Risse, 2002), and I had no problems with my professor's choice. Why should I? Who was I to comment on her marriage? However, that began to change as we engaged the topic of WP.

To introduce WP, Dr. Jonalle had us read Joe Feagin's *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression*. I do not recall Dr. Jonalle building our background knowledge or preparing us for this topic. Instead, she copied a few chapters from his book, told us to read them and post a reflection to our class website before our next class. As I read Feagin's text, I felt like I was hit by a sucker punch. I kept thinking, *who is Feagin to blame me for things that happened before I was born?* I felt attacked for crimes I did not commit. Yes, I agreed that heinous things have happened to marginalized populations, but I did not do these acts. As I wrote and posted my reflection I was angry, and as I read my classmates' reflections, they echoed the same sentiment. Needless to say, I was interested to see how our Dr. Jonalle was going to handle our reflections.

During our next class meeting, I recall our Dr. Jonalle taking a defensive posture as she responded to our questions such as: *Why did you have us read this article? Who is Feagin to lay blame? So, what are we supposed to do about all this? How are you qualified to teach such a text and topic?* It was easy to tell that we were angry at her for having us read this text and we demanded an explanation. I believe it was in response to our last question when our professor, who was visibly distraught with our written reflections and posed questions, lashed out at us. She admonished us by stating her marriage to a hardworking African man is a model for how we are

to respond to the past. It has been years since she made that comment, and I have considered it deeply. At the time, I recall thinking that she was using her marriage as a way to credential herself to speak about WP, social justice, and living a conscious lifestyle. After seven years have gone by, two graduate degrees later, and the experience of my own failures teaching diversity, I now think that she was just utterly disappointed with us. It was clear that she highly valued diversity and social justice, and that she wanted us to share her passions. Yet, her use of an aggressive text to introduce us to those topics was misguided. To her credit, she revisited WP the following week and had us read McIntosh's article, but it was too late. The horse was out of the barn. We still had a strong resentment towards her, and we were suspicious of her intentions for the remainder of the class. We went from having a community to being in a guarded environment.

Teaching and White Privilege

After earning my M.Ed. and teaching high school English for another two years, I returned to graduate school in pursuit of my doctorate in secondary education. As I progressed through my coursework, I stumbled upon a class titled "Critical Race Theory" and enrolled.

The class was taught by Dr. Hiffer (pseudonym), a White woman in her mid-30s, who was a professor of qualitative methodology. My classmates consisted of three White females, two White males, two Black females, and myself. Dr. Hiffer explained that we would complete two major projects, read several books and articles about race, and engage in class conversation. I recall feeling very excited to engage this mysterious topic of "race" with my classmates, but I was also filled with anxiety. Outside of my experience while earning my M.Ed. and a few conversations with close friends, who were all White, I never discussed race openly. This class quickly changed that.

To begin class, we read Delgado's and Stefancic's 2nd edition of *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Derrick Bell's landmark article titled *Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma*, and multiple articles authored by Gloria Ladson-Billings. From those texts, I began to understand different perspective of race and, perhaps more importantly, gain the language I needed to discuss race meaningfully. I found being able to use the correct jargon when talking about racial issues was very important to me, and it was at this time when I had a "light bulb" moment about institutional and systemic racism.

Before taking Critical Race Theory, I understand that racism was bad, in the broadest sense possible. I abhorred discrimination and racial epithets. Being a Jew, I was the butt of many jokes growing up, and it was not hard for me to make a connection between anti-Semitism and racism. To me, they were both acts of hate. However, the dimension of these more subtle forms of racism – institutionalized and systemic – was lost on me. Before taking the class, I knew that more minorities lived in poverty, populated prisons, scored lower on standardized tests, and worked lower paying jobs than Whites, and I knew that these statistics have been relatively stable and predictable for generations. However, what I did not know was *why*. For class, we read multiple articles that attempted to explain why, and I learned a lot from them. In fact, Bell's article, which we read very early in the semester, about Brown v. Board provided a strong example of how and why these subtle types of racism work and are at play in society. Then, as we read about and discussed inequitable sentencing for drug crimes; unfair employment, financial, and housing opportunities for minorities as compared to Whites; and the demographics of students labeled for self-contained special education I began to see how much I was truly advantaged. This understanding help me see exactly how I had benefited from my WP all my life without knowing it. Furthermore, the two projects we completed in this class further cemented that concept in me.

To understand privilege, it is necessary that we "unpack" who were as individuals. To help us examine who we are, Dr. Hiffer created the Intersectionality Project. In brief,

intersectionality refers to the multiple dimensions of our personhood that combine to make our human identity (Symington, 2004). For this project we had to complete three steps, which were:

> *Step 1:* Create a bulleted list of who you are. This list should include ideas about your race, familial relationships, religion, interests, profession, and any other ways in which you identify "who you are" as a human.
>
> *Step 2:* Conduct a "scavenger hunt" of your possessions. As you examine your belongings, note how or if they reflect the bulleted items you listed in Step 1.
>
> *Step 3:* Compose a 3-5 page narrative that explains if there was or was not a relationship between what you listed in Step 1 and found in Step 2. Then explain what that relationship does or does not mean in terms of your intersectionality.

As I went through the process of completing these three steps and composing my narrative, I realized how much I hide my own diversities, so I can be a "mainstream" member of society. On my list I created for *Step 1*, the only two ways I stood out from mainstream society is my advanced education and religion. While earning a Ph.D. at the time, I did not view that as a negative. In fact, when reading my narrative, I discussed how positive and fortunate I was to gain this education. I had the finances and freedom to pause my "working career" to return to graduate school at the age of 28. My religion was a bit more interesting. I am a Jew. I became a bar mitzvah at the age of 13, observe the High Holy Days, and "keep kosher" for Passover. However, for *Step 1*, I also listed that I am a ginger (a red head), an athlete, tall (6'3"), and balding. With these attributes in mind, I then "scavenged" my house for items that reflected these attributes. For being Jewish, I found a prayer book, a Maccabee doll, a menorah, and a mezuzah. I found I had no objects for being a ginger. For an athlete, I found some old sports equipment, workout clothes and shoes, and an assortment of awards. My clothes were my possessions that best documented my height, which included the inseam of my jeans and the XLT shirt sizes found in my closet. For being bald, I found some floppy hats I wear when I go outside. With my list complete, possessions scavenged, and narrative compose, I went to class.

As the class shifted from a discussion based on our weekly readings to the completion of our Intersectionality project, I learned quickly about my WP. To share our projects, we went around the room and each student was given a few minutes to discuss what he or she listed and wrote before we went into whole group discussion. During that discussion, I do not remember who said it or how it was said, but the understanding about WP I gained that day will always stay with me. That day I learned I can hide any attribute of who I am because of the color of my skin and reap the benefits of my Whiteness. If I do not want to be recognized as a Jew, I can hide it. People cannot identify me as a Jew unless I let them. If I do not want people to know I earned a Ph.D., I can hide it. People cannot identify me as a doctor of education unless I let them. In this way, I can quickly blend in the majority population and never be concerned, if I so choose to. However, as my Black classmates shared, they talked about their skin color and how they cannot hide it. I recall one classmate discussing how she can wear "the cutest American Eagle or Abercrombie clothing and still be seen as Black." She explained her Blackness as being in her hair, her dress, her culture. "It is who I am," she said. As she made that last comment – "It is who I am" – I realized I never saw "White" as being who I am, but it was and is always there. By me being blind to my own race, I was not unnoticing the WP I had been afforded all my life simply because of the color of my skin. Of the 26 advantages of being White listed by McIntosh (1989), I benefited from each one and my Black classmates benefited from none. As the class ended and that realization fresh in my head, I thought back to how Dr. Jonalle, who had us read Feagin five years previously, approached WP versus how we approached Dr. Hiffer approached it. I thought of the very different methods used and how my understanding of WP was formed in response to each. And then I thought, "Now that I understand my WP, what am I supposed to do about it?"

The Social Justice project we completed as part of the Critical Race Theory class was designed for us to become activist. As a central tenet of Critical Race Theory is not just to learn and be aware of the idea, concept, or phenomenon being observed, but it is that we take action to improve society because of it (Delgado, R., & Stefancic, 2012; Harris, 1994). With this principle in mind, Dr. Hiffer explained to us that we were each to think about how we can become a social justice activist in some compartment of our life, and that we would compose a paper and make a class presentation about our work. As I reflected about this assignment and considered where I had the biggest impact on society, I came to understand that I had a huge stage and audience every time I taught a class. While I earned my Ph.D., I also served as a graduate teaching assistant. In that role, I taught multiple education classes to undergraduate and graduate students. In these classes, I taught lesson planning skills, assessment strategies, and current trends and issues in education among a myriad of other education-related topics. Therefore, as I considered how I was going to complete the Social Justice project, I decided to use my teaching.

Teaching from a social justice perspective, especially as a White male, is a unique experience. The class I was teaching while completing the Social Justice project was an introduction to secondary education course. In brief, the class was a survey of secondary education topics that included different types of schools, the history of education in the United States, basic lesson planning and assessment skills, and general teaching strategies. Because the class was an open, general survey of secondary education, I was eager to try integrating a social justice perspective into the class. However, although I knew how I defined the term *social justice*, I did not know what it meant to teach it.

To ground my teaching in social justice, I first wanted to adopt a way of thinking about social justice in education, and, after reviewing how social justice was discussed in multiple articles, I decided to use the words of Boyd, Wadham, and Jewell (2007), which were:

> The topic [Key Educational Ideas] implicitly addresses issues of social justice; that is, questions of social and cultural difference are considered in relation to issues of inclusion, access and the distribution of knowledge and resources. Social justice in this topic is considered in its breadth, with the aim being to help students begin to understand the contested character of education and just teaching practice. (p. 305)

I chose to use this quote as my guide because the population engaged in the study was aligned to the population that I was teaching; both the study and I were working with pre-service who were taking introductory educational courses. Furthermore, I was curious about how the term – "the contested character of education" – was used. In fact, I was so interested in that term that I made it the focus of my Social Justice Project, which eventually became titled "Teaching the Contested Character of Education." Again, I needed to define this term to ground my project, or at least put it in my own words. For guidance, I conducted an internet search of the term, but it did not yield useful results. So, I decided to craft my own definition.

To me, I understand the *contested character of education* as the population of people who have been "wronged" or "underserved" by public education in the United States. By using that understanding to unpack the term, I quickly realized it could be applied to several minority groups including: African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, and LBGT individuals among several other groups. Because of how many populations could be included in this definition and African-Americans being the focus of the Critical Race Theory class, I decided to limit my social justice-oriented teaching to African-Americans, and I was ready to consider how I was going to teach from that perspective.

Again, being a White male who was teaching a majority White class (I had one Black student and one Asian student), I was conscious of how contradictory I could be if I followed the technique of the professor who first tried to introduce WP to me. However, I still knew I had challenging topics to discuss. With these thoughts in mind, I decided to open with a discussion of

the Achievement Gap and then transition into the Opportunity Gap. As I prepared for to begin teaching from a social justice perspective, I recall being very nervous and spending several hours planning my 75-minute class. I made charts and graphs using the National Assessment of Education Progress's (NAEP) Data Explorer (http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/dataset.aspx) to show the Achievement Gap between White, Asian, Hispanic, Black, and bi-racial individuals. I chose to use these different groups because, even though I was focusing my Social Justice project on African-Americans, I did not want my students to have a narrow view of the Achievement Gap. I then pulled statistics about the work force, income levels higher education attainment, and prison populations for these same groups from a variety of .gov sources. Finally, I crafted questions and a think-pair-share activity for my students to consider if they saw any patterns or could make connections between the different data sets. To frame the class, I told my students we would be examining Achievement Gap data together and that we were going to do a think-pair-share activity based on that data. I then began class by explaining the Achievement Gap in this context as a quantitative measure for analyzing how different groups of people perform on a standardized test. As I presented and explained the data I prepared, I saw my students nod their heads and make some notes. I was pleased because I interpreted their body language as being willing to engage this topic, not reject it as the class I was in years prior had done. After I finished, I projected the questions I had prepared and asked my students to compose a response to each one. The specific questions I prepared included:

1. How does the data you saw highlight the Achievement Gap?
2. What were the biggest gaps in achievement?
3. Did the NAEP data relate or not relate to the other data sets – work force, income levels higher education attainment, and prison populations – you viewed?
4. What do you suppose caused these gaps to exist?
5. As a future educator, how will, or will you, respond to this data?

After I projected the questions, I watched. I watched some of my students begin writing furiously, I watched others sit there and reread the questions over and over, and I watched others write a few words and look around the room. And I waited. I waited for three minutes, then five minutes, and then seven. Some students kept writing, some stopped writing, some tried to get my attention to move the lesson along, and I waited. After 15 minutes had passed, I quietly whispered, "Turn to your partner and share your thoughts." With that, the class exploded. Students were talking rapidly, using their hands and voices to energetically exchange ideas. I walked around the room and listened. I listened to voices of confusion, frustration, blame, and anger. I heard one student explain a political manifesto. A few pairs of students tried to stop me to ask a question regarding a debate they were having. I told them that this was a time for them to talk, not me. I continued to walk around the room. Finally, with time running out in class, I stopped and asked them to share their thoughts. No group spoke; the room was silent. So, I waited. Finally, a pair of female students said a comment, which lead to a fury comments by the other groups. I do not recall any groups' specific comments nor did I write them down, but I did write about them in the journal I kept for the experience.

> I don't think I failed. Their comments were on topic, and I think my students realized that an Achievement Gap does exist. They spoke of equitable education, engaging students, and having a responsibility to do so in their own teaching practices. However, no one spoke about why these Achievement Gaps existed in the first place. (Journal Entry, 2009, p. 2)

It was this last part of my journal entry that propelled my thinking about the "contested character of education."

Conclusion

To me, I see the "contested character of education" to be the Opportunity Gap. The Achievement Gap is easy to see. A multitude of data shows it. However, the Opportunity Gap is more subtle. Like Hamilton and Ture (1967) wrote about decades earlier, the Achievement Gap is easy to appall and speak against because it is a form of individual racism. It can be seen and it is safe to talk about and abhor. White individuals lose nothing by speaking out against it and are not threatened by it. However, it is the Opportunity Gap that represents forms of institutional racism. There are no easy fixes to the Opportunity Gap, and efforts to end the Opportunity Gap require multiple members of society to work in sync, large amounts of resources to be used, and thoughtful political action to happen. I interpreted the omission of my students in response to question four to represent a form of institutional racism. To me, addressing the "contested character of education" means closing the Opportunity Gap.

In close, having conversation about the Achievement Gap and Opportunity Gap have to happen. Being an unprepared, first-year teacher began to teach me those lessons firsthand and why we, as teacher educators, need to address those topics in our classrooms. However, we need to be strategic about how we have those conversations. Using Achievement Gap data, for me, worked as a safe strategy to enter into those conversations with my students. Because I used Achievement Gap data, I let the numbers do the talking for me and then guided the conversation. This strategy allowed me to work as a facilitator instead of an arbitrator. I allowed my students to construct their own opinions about the Achievement Gap. By using this tactic, it paved the way for my later lessons about culturally responsive teaching methods, multicultural education, and the importance of differentiated instruction. Additionally, I was able to discuss deeply the nuances of the Achievement Gap as related to different educational polices and legal rulings.

Finally, if we are to be true activists and change education, the teacher education programs that create tomorrow's teachers must meaningfully address WP today. Statistically, the racial demographics of public school students are rapidly changing and growing my diverse (Center for Public Education, 2012), but the demographics of teachers are largely remaining consistent (Feistritzer, 2011). In order for tomorrow's students to be receive a high-quality education, it is crucial tomorrow's teachers are prepared to teach them. This not only means that teachers need to know and be able to use effective teaching strategies for diverse learners, but it also includes teachers understanding their WP and how that may be received by their students. I believe that all students deserve a quality education provided by thoughtful, effective teachers. Yet, in order for that to happen, teachers must recognized who they are and the elements that comprise them, of which WP is one.

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