

Walking into a Sea of Whiteness: On the (Im)possibilities of Being a Teacher Candidate of Colour

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What are the experiences and stories of a teacher candidate of colour in relation to race and racism in Teacher Education?

Introduction

I concur with Spivak (1992): "Autobiography is where the blood of history does not dry" (p. 795).

Through that provocation, I am drawn to personal narrative inquiry, guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT). One allows me to work within the wound (Palulis, 2009) while the other situates theory on race and racism. Threading them in tandem, and as hooks (2013) suggests, they bring "me back from the edges of despair" (p. 8). In that way, this is a journey—one to make sense of complex and ineffable encounters while also reaching the shore.

On Collapsing

I am shrouded, but I go on, only to find my Brownness to be even more maimed. Words like 'coloured' and 'creature' prick me. These are only some of the racial microaggressions that I confront, where subtle but hurtful remarks are made about my body, culture, and identity (Marom, 2019). I am also weighed down by conversations where white teacher candidates first deny their white privilege and then employ a rhetoric of guilt and shame. For me, as well as for others who are witnesses to this collapse, we have no room to breathe.

On Arrival

It always begins this way, where some bodies are more noticed than others (Ahmed, 2007). My own arrival, as I enter Orientation Day, is defined by said space, where I am pressed against the sharp edge of a white background. Here, my body is hypervisible, as it stands out in contrast to the white bodies, but it is invisible in every other way. In my practicum, though most of the students are Black and Brown, the teachers are mostly white, and as the students arrive to school, I am told they are from 'lazy' communities.

On Finding Community

Unable to go on, it is a community of teacher candidates of colour who rescues me. We come together and do what Venzant Chambers and McCready (2011) call "making space." Together, we create a community that centres our voices, giving us an opportunity to grapple with the racism in Teacher Education while healing. It is what I call a "collective breath," where we let out our emotions and feelings, holding them with care and consideration. In that way, we nurture what Pour-Khorshid (2018) calls a fugitive learning space, where we can laugh, restore, and (un)learn.

On Beginning

The curriculum, wrought by whiteness, is also another space where the white space takes shape. The texts that are engaged are mostly void of race. They reverberate a white curriculum, framed through a Western canon. When the Other is centred and framed, we are taken up through damage and misrepresentations. Practicum is no different, where "diverse" texts are placed so high on the bookshelves in the library that they cannot be reached. When I and others name such matters, we become the problem, as Ahmed (2017) suggests.

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