

Embracing the Tensions: Using Teachable Moments to Explore the Racialized Educational Experiences of Students in Traditionally White Classrooms

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Abstract

In the last decade, the use of critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework within educational research has increased. However the curricular study of CRT and its use in pedagogical approaches within the classroom remain underexplored in the extant literature. A professor and two doctoral candidates at a research-intensive university describe the process of creating a graduate-level education course in CRT, through analytical consideration of CRT tenets and their purposeful use in course development and implementation.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory (CRT); Pedagogy; Diversity; Tension; Conflict

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Currently in higher education, dominant notions of traditional teaching as knowledge transmission and social scientific curriculum remain pervasive (Posner, 1995). Traditional teaching practices, coined as the “banking method” by Freire (1970), consist of educators depositing knowledge into students and society, withdrawing that knowledge to reproduce dominant social norms. Embedded within these practices is the belief that education and curriculum are both objective and neutral. In contrast to traditional ideas of education, an increasing number of scholars advocate for educational transformation, proposing multicultural education and critical pedagogical practices as a more socially just ideal (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Nunan, George, & McCausland, 2000; Wink, 2005; Yosso, 2002). Their advocacy positions students as capable and active participants in education rather than empty vessels in need of expert knowledge. Although these scholars and others have created a space in which the call for the interrogation of traditional practices has been heard, their argument has yet to result in substantive curriculum reform within the majority of academic institutions (Tuitt, 2009). In reference to the slow and cumbersome process that curriculum change entails, Allen and Estler (2005) explained that “modifying curricula and courses parceled among faculty with varying specialties, disparate levels of expertise related to diversity, and already full course syllabi is daunting at best” (p. 210).

Given the lack of movement toward progressive curriculum reform, this essay provides richly documented insight into the implementation of a critical race theory (CRT) course in higher education dedicated not only to exploring CRT but also to

critical pedagogy in practice. As the instructional team (myself as professor and two PhD students), our hope is that this reflection on how we explored, interrogated, and embraced the racialized tensions in our CRT classroom will provide insight into not only how instructors interested in curriculum reform can develop and teach similar courses but also how to leverage teachable moments in their classrooms to foster reflexivity, dialogue, and learning. In this vein, we map our preparation for the Critical Race Theory and Education seminar, share our course objectives, and narrate our experiences as an instructional team to offer a case study of how CRT manifests as theory, pedagogy, and methodology in CRT classrooms.

Preparing to Teach

During an unassuming spring at a research-intensive, traditionally White¹ university in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States, record numbers of graduate students signed up for a seminar entitled Critical Race Theory and Education. The 22 students largely mirrored the population in the College of Education in terms of gender, with 86% identifying as women. However, while graduate students of Color accounted for 15.8% of the population in the College of Education, students of Color from multiple racial backgrounds made up 41% students enrolled in the course. The class had not been offered previously, and as such, students did not have a great deal of information about the course. All they knew was that it would be taught by a highly regarded Black male professor in the department who could be relied upon to engage students in critical dialogue, require extensive scholarly reading and reflection, and expect personal, political,

and intellectual risk taking. They got this, and more. In addition to the Black, male, heterosexual-identified professor, two PhD candidates also taught the class: one a biracial (Black and White), heterosexual-identified woman; the other, a White, queer-identified woman. The instructional team, by intentional pedagogical design, provided a lower student-to-teacher ratio, enriched and enabled instructor-facilitated small group discussions, and altered traditional notions of power dynamics in terms of student/teacher racial identity relationships. The result emerged as a complex but effective environment for teaching and learning, critical self-reflexivity, and transformation.

In preparation to teach the new course, we began by conducting a comprehensive review of the literature on CRT in education. Our work was considerably informed by Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) introduction of CRT into the field of education. Additionally we drew from Solórzano's (1997) articulation of CRT as "a pedagogy, curriculum, and research agenda that accounts for the role of racism in U.S. education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of the larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination in education" (p. 7). Overall, we came to understand CRT as a theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological approach to teaching and research in education that was relatively young and also controversial (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003). Take for example Ladson-Billings's (1998) provocative question, "Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a *nice* field like education?" (p. 7). Despite its relatively recent application in education, numerous scholars have embraced CRT and used it as an oppositional framework to critically analyze education research and

practice (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Tate, 1997). More specifically, education scholars have relied upon CRT to address school discipline and hierarchy (Duncan, 2002; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Teranishi, 2002), affirmative action (Taylor, 2000), curriculum development (Yosso, 2002), standardized testing (Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004), meritocracy (Lopez, 2003), and the lived educational experiences of students of Color (Duncan, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

In describing the benefits of implementing CRT in classroom settings, Yosso (2002) explained, "Critical race theory can be a guide for educators to expose and challenge contemporary forms of racial inequality, which are disguised as 'neutral' and 'objective' structures, processes, and discourses of school curriculum" (p. 93). Structures are described as the constraints that determine which classes are to teach certain types and "legitimated" forms of knowledge; processes refer to the practices and policies that place certain students in certain classes in which certain knowledge is taught; and discourses refer to the ways in which language is used to explain issues of access in higher education and justify why certain students are educated within certain curricula (Yosso, 2002). Yosso's (2002) argument suggests that the current educational system is encumbered by entrenched notions of non-White subordination and White privilege. Thus, dominant structures, processes, and discourses in education serve to perpetuate and rationalize educational inequalities, including access to quality education, adequate college preparation, and tracking practices (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2002). As an oppositional framework, CRT challenges

dominant ideologies by incorporating the subjugated knowledge and experience of historically marginalized identity groups (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). By explicitly implementing CRT in classrooms, the voices that have often been silent throughout history are deemed worthy of serious consideration and crucial to understanding articulations of race and racism in textbooks, classrooms, policy making, and so on.

According to Yosso's (2002) description of a CRT curriculum, a CRT course would

1. Openly acknowledge the centrality of race while acknowledging the intersections of identities in the perpetuation of subordination in curricular structures, practices, and discourses;
2. Challenge dominant, oppressive discourses by providing students with an oppositional discourse to apply to education;
3. Aim toward the end goals of social consciousness, social transformation, and social justice;
4. Create a space for counternarratives rooted in lived experiences to refute dominant expressions of "truth" and "reality"; and
5. Allow students to theoretically link educational practices to social inequalities from an interdisciplinary stance.

With Yosso's (2002) guidance in mind, our instructional team developed the following course objectives:

1. We will explore how racial inequities are produced, reproduced, and maintained within social institutions of education.
2. We will strive to create affirming spaces for counterdiscourses that refute ideological constructions of "truth" and "reality."
3. We will work to understand and value the similarities and differences among the experiences of people with different racial backgrounds in P-20 education.
4. We will use CRT to inform our personal, social, political, and intellectual experiences as racial beings.
5. We will engage in CRT with the end goals of heightened social consciousness and social transformation.

To create a context that would foster the fulfillment of our course objectives, we committed to positioning student perspectives as worthy of recognition and inclusion throughout the duration of the course. Creating a safe space within the course for a plurality of student voices and perspectives to be heard was key for students to develop nonessentialist views of race, identity, and experience. Finally, we made a commitment to embody critical pedagogy ourselves by including a position statement in the syllabus that transparently communicated who we were individually and collectively.

Overall, we rooted our approach to pedagogical transparency in the belief that it was vital for instructors, especially those immersed within diversity, critical theory, and intercultural communication, to grant students access to the aspects of our

identities that influence our curriculum design and pedagogical practices. Thus, commensurate with CRT, we embraced the notion that we are not objective nor are we separated from our personal experiences with race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on. As such, each instructor consistently shared personal reflections based upon his or her thoughts, feelings, perspectives, and experiences on living a critical-raced reality. More simply stated, through personal narrative and counterstorytelling, we modeled how to connect CRT with our everyday lives. In theory, this openness and risk taking on the part of the instructional team created trust and opportunities for students who might, in some way, identify with the experiences being shared.

Implementing CRT as a Theory, Pedagogy, and Methodology

Using CRT as topic, pedagogy, and methodology in the classroom is complex. However, it is an approach that lends itself to the application of an informed theoretical lens to everyday experiences for the purpose of generating shared meaning and systemic transformation. The strengths of CRT are numerous in size and scope. Most poignantly, it expands the space in which critical pedagogical practices can be articulated and implemented. In alignment with Freire (1970), who advocated for critical thinking, and the notion of curriculum justice proposed by Nunan et al. (2000), the implementation of CRT has the potential to provide students and teachers with a methodological tool for personal and social transformation. In this way, CRT promotes the use of narrative to break the silence imposed by dominant discourses surrounding race, gender, class, sexuality, and other intersecting social identities. With the embrace of powerful narratives that give

social and political voice to the experiences of subordinate identity groups exists the potential for scholars to shape graduate students “in ways that aim to build a distinctive and socially responsible (inclusive) society” (Nunan et al., 2000, p. 64). Therefore, CRT calls not only for racial consciousness (i.e., color does matter) but social consciousness (i.e., social justice and activism) matters as well. Numerous scholars have examined communities of Color. However the majority have conducted their research and, intentionally or unintentionally, “spoken for” rather than “spoken with” communities of Color (Alcoff, 1991). In contrast, CRT provides researchers with a means to speak *with* their research participants, underscored by a genuine impetus to create space for voices to be heard.

Within the course itself, an inclusive space was also created by allowing the counterstories of people of Color to be openly valued and included via readings, discussions, and guest speakers at a traditionally White institution (TWI) in dire need of racial and ethnic minority insight. Additionally, assignments included the completing of a racial autobiography, weekly reflective briefs, and an in-depth policy analysis in order to provide locations where normative societal narratives were disrupted and analyzed to explore endemic racial inequities at both the individual and systemic levels. We also knew that it would be important to document and reflect on our lived experiences teaching and learning about CRT at a TWI. Accordingly, we agreed to engage in participatory action research, with the understanding that it could be a useful tool for our endeavor because it would provide a reflective process that would allow for inquiry and discussion as components of the “research.” Often, action research is a collaborative activity

among colleagues searching for solutions to everyday, real-world problems experienced in schools, or looking for ways to improve instruction and increase student achievement. Given the diversity among the three instructors and the course design, we felt that action research would be the appropriate method to document our teaching and learning experiences in the course. This approach importantly allowed us to include our personal/political/intellectual reflections as instructors, due to the natural alignment between social action research and social constructivism (Lincoln, 2001). Furthermore, rather than dealing solely with the theoretical, an action research approach allows practitioners to address those concerns closest to them and, ideally, inspire change agents through a social-constructivist pedagogy by employing critical thinking, dialogue, and small group collaboration as essential features and outcomes of, in our context, a CRT course.

Our action research process augmented by a critical race methodology was cyclical, involving a “non-linear pattern of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting on the changes in the social situations” (Noffke & Stevenson, 1995, p. 2). As the three emerging scholars who taught the course, we hoped that our location at the center of our research site (the classroom) would increase not only the trustworthiness of findings but also the accuracy of our analysis of the raw data. From a methodological perspective, the study also revealed how CRT can serve not only as a theoretical topic of study, but also as a means to examine the layered nuances of learning the theory. The process of teaching CRT as theory and applying CRT as pedagogy and methodology required a great deal of dialogue and labor from the instructional team.

To foster sustained dialogue among ourselves as instructors, the instructional team regularly met before and after class to discuss and negotiate course design, readings, activities, and roles. For example, we set agendas for each individual class period and strategized how to introduce and offer our own personal narratives as models of how to come to voice as risk taking and how to engage authentically in tension-filled classroom settings. In addition, course materials, perspectives, journal reflections, and pedagogical possibilities were openly shared and debated among the three instructors on a weekly basis during the entirety of the course. Jointly, all instructors felt it would be important to reflect on their lived experiences and also agreed to journaling about the course. Participatory action research (PAR) was not only a method engaged for this work; it was a central component to the pedagogy of our CRT course. Through the use of dialogic reflection, collaboration across instructors and student groups, counterhegemonic approaches and thinking, and the continuous relation of CRT to practice and the lived classroom experience, the concepts of CRT were brought out through explicit examination of power structures within and outside the classroom.

In conducting our qualitative inquiry and analysis of course materials, we examined class agendas, student essays, class dialogue, and instructor journals as data for our case study (Yin, 2002). Actual course materials, such as PowerPoint lectures, class-planning materials, and lesson plan packets used by the instructors, were also sources of data. Dialogue on critical pedagogy in the classroom and our roles as instructors was also offered. Finally, although each member of the teaching team had previous personal and professional experiences with diversity and education, it

is important to note that this was the first time a CRT course had been taught by any of the instructors. That being said, we experienced a number of pleasant and yet difficult surprises.

Learning Team Selection

The purpose of the course was to enable students to engage intellectually and developmentally with CRT and the sociopolitical implications of CRT in education. As a graduate seminar, the class utilized discussion, self-reflection, and learning teams as pedagogical elements. Students were evaluated based on weekly responses in reaction to the readings, the development of an annotated bibliography, a personal reflection paper, and a group research project. During the course, assignments were amended to allow for personal growth and needs based on desired learning outcomes. To facilitate discussion and a higher level of critical analysis, students were asked to form small groups, described as “learning teams” by the instructors. The use of small, collaborative learning teams as a pedagogical technique was chosen due to implications for student learning and development, retention, and specifically because of the positive correlation between collaborative learning and diversity (Tinto, 1997; Vogt, 1997). Research has shown that regardless of

subject matter, students working in small groups tend to learn more content and retain what they have learned longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats (Bruffee, 2000; Chickering & Reisser, 1991; Goodsell, Maher, & Tinto, 1992; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991; Slavin, 1990). Small groups also have positive implications for learning in regard to matters of personal and shared identity as well as embracing diverse perspectives on lived experiences (Tuitt, 2008). Likewise, collaborative learning positively correlates with openness to diversity more significantly than factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or pre-collegiate academic ability (Cabrera et al., 2002). As such, learning teams were an essential component of our course.

On our first evening of class, 22 students were asked to organize themselves into 3 learning teams in which they would meet weekly to dialogue about the readings.¹ The teaching team thought it best to allow this process of choosing teams to happen organically and asked the students to form their groups by the end of the first class. A woman of Color opted to send a sign-up sheet around the room with “Team 1,” “Team 2,” and “Team 3” listed at the top. Near the end of the class, the teaching community announced that the remaining

¹ We intentionally offer insight into identities only selectively to the reader for a number of reasons: We choose to not reify overly simplistic social difference dichotomies in the classroom; at any given moment we cannot (as instructors) ascribe the dominant identity salience from our students’ perspectives; and finally, we choose to explore the convergence of intersectionality. The reader can

assume a strong variety in backgrounds from students that lent itself toward heterogeneity.

time would be used to form the learning teams and were informed that a sign-up sheet had already been circulated. One of the instructors received the sheet and verbally assigned the two students who were absent to the open spaces on Team 2 and Team 3. The groups were asked to meet and coordinate their next meeting. It quickly became apparent that there was only one person of Color on Team 1. By comparison, the remaining eight students of color were divided between Teams 2 and 3. The day following our initial class meeting, the teaching community received the following email from the lone woman of Color on Team 1:

Hi all, I was wondering if you could assign another person of Color to my group before next week. Thanks.

One member of the instructional team sent the following response:

In looking at the lists we were concerned as well. We will and we'll send out an email to everyone so any changes are clear. However, we'll mask your request in our concerns. Thank you for coming to us from the get go.

After meeting to discuss the issue, the teaching team jointly decided to engage in dialogue with the class concerning the racial and ethnic demographics of the learning teams rather than changing the composition of the learning teams via email as originally indicated. Prior to the second class period, the lone woman of Color on Team 1 was contacted by the initial instructor who responded to her email to let her know that the instructional team had instead decided to present the issue to the class.

At the beginning of the second class period, the issue was presented to the large group. The woman of Color who had sent the email openly expressed her desire not to be the only person of Color on Team 1. Quickly the discussion turned to how the lists had been started and whether or not the outcome was unfair. As it turned out, the woman of Color on Team 1 had started the lists, but had clearly not intended for the outcome that had occurred. In response to her admission that she had been the one to start the lists, some students, especially students of Color, were empathetic. However, none of the students of Color from Teams 2 or 3 volunteered to join Team 1, subsequently disregarding the woman of Color's request not to be the only person of Color in her group. In addition, White students on Team 1 were opposed to her switching to a different team because they wanted to engage in conversation with someone who identified as a person of Color. Students looked to the instructional team to make a definitive decision. However, instead of solving the problem, we created a space where they were able to discuss in greater depth the dilemma that they wanted to escape. By the end of the second class, the students came to a resolution, which we highlight in the next section, alongside our pedagogical desire to embody CRT as an instructional team, while simultaneously helping the class process their group selection experience.

The Black male professor began the next class by reading his journal reflection (noted below in italics) out loud as a means to ground the learning team selection in course readings.

So to reflect on our discussion last week, we thought we would ask CRT scholars what they thought about our group selection process and discussion. It is safe to

say that we had what Lopez (2003) would call a racial conflict. Specifically, we engaged in educational politics, which emerged from the underlying tensions surrounding competing values and interests, as well as the processes and mechanisms by which those tensions get resolved. The competing values and interests as we saw them centered around (a) the desire of the students of Color for support and affirmation from other students of Color who, in theory, get it and a desire to not be isolated in a dialogue group as the lone native informant (hooks, 1994) with the enemy; and (b) a desire on the part of White students to be a part of a racially diverse dialogue group so that they could engage in conversation with the “other,” as if their White colleagues have nothing of value to offer. Lopez (2003) suggested that every conflict has the potential of creating a chain reaction and that the outcome of the conflict was, itself, determined by this reaction.

As we saw it we had three choices:

1. Our first option consisted of randomly assigning students based on some numerical equation. However Dixson and Rousseau (2005) warned that treating students equally as an approach to ensure equity represents a restrictive understanding of the nature of equity, viewing equity as an equality of treatment rather than outcomes. This process on the surface might seem equitable and fair, but in reality could have negative effects on students of Color. It is restrictive in the sense that it focuses on numerical equivalency and equality of process rather than on the actual educational

outcomes and experiences of students of Color (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). This random process also provides an illusion of fairness because it is seen as a colorblind group selection process. However Dixson and Rousseau also warned that the insistence on race-neutral or colorblind approaches negates the social and historical context and leaves the privileged and oppressive position of Whiteness unchallenged. For example, there is an assumption that the racism that exists outside of the classroom walls does not seep through to contaminate our learning space. White privilege is not having to struggle with these issues once you leave the classroom, or not having to worry about being the only White student in the group.

2. Our second option would have been to move some of the students of Color around to ensure that each group had a balance of students of Color. In that sense, we would have been integrating or desegregating the learning teams. The problem with that, as Bell (1980) citing Wechsler indicated, is that integration forces an association upon those for whom it is unpleasant or repugnant. Although this racial balancing might alter the racial appearance of inclusion, it doesn't eliminate the reality of racial discrimination.

Whereas we may have a desire to suspend reality and leave our racial baggage at the

door, Gillborn (2005) warned that if we only focused on the scale of inequity, and school-level approaches to addressing it, we would lose sight of the most powerful forces in society that sustain and extend these inequalities. In other words, by suggesting an outcome that promoted racial balancing, we ran the risk of assuming that we all operated in this class on a level playing field and that issues related to race privilege, power, and oppression did not apply in this learning context. Although for some students this may have been simply an educational experience, for others it might be a constant reminder of how cruel this world can be.

3. Our third option was to allow for a voluntary resegregation in which both students of Color and White students volunteered to switch groups. Unlike forced bussing (the essence of Option 2), this option, in theory, provided students with a sense of agency; they had the choice to move or not to move. This option emerged as the preferred choice of the class. We formed what Dixson and Rousseau (2005) called a silent covenant: a tacit agreement that occurred when our competing interests converged. Romero (2003) would argue that this resolution was based on some form of rational discrimination where individual profiling was based on a generalized impression of what students of Color offer to each other and to White students.

Taylor (2000) might see this “exchange program” resolution as some sort of diversity visa program, nothing more than a means to correct the racial imbalance.

What was interesting to the instructional team was that, for a moment in our discussion, it seemed that the interest convergence of competing values moved toward a focus on gaining relief from the conflict and away from the potential harm or threat of isolation that the lone student of Color potentially faced. Ironically, the interests of White students who were already in diverse dialogue groups converged with students of Color who were already in groups with several students of Color, representing a critical mass. We wondered what role skin color and gender played in this conflict. Specifically, had the lone student of Color been of a darker shade or a male, might the other students of Color have been so reluctant to give up their perceived sense of community?

Alternatively, we pondered how our White students would have responded if all the students of Color wanted to form their own learning team. Would they have been willing to sacrifice individual desires in favor of appeasing ethnic minority group interests? Would they confirm Taylor’s (2000) assumption that Whites simply cannot envision the personal responsibility and potential sacrifice inherent in the conclusion that true equality for people of Color will require the surrender of racism-granted privileges for Whites? We were not convinced but still hopeful that we might be able to find an answer to Taylor’s question of whether or not it is possible for disparate groups to find common interests.

Much like the initial dissonance and struggle during the group sort, the instructional team spent a great deal of time in discussion with each other about how to honor the needs of each student, to authentically embody CRT as a pedagogical approach, and to utilize this real-world experience as a metacognitive tool to raise awareness on race, power, and politics within educational settings. To keep with a social-constructivist CRT approach, the instructional team decided to structure support in the environment by creating opportunities for the students to engage in dialogue and interrogate the power structure of the educational environment over which they had the agency to influence the outcome of the learning team's decision. In doing so, the instructional team aimed to make the act of "doing CRT" visible while also making explicit the tension and oppression that is often implicit within traditionally White institutions. To accomplish this, we were transparent in describing our response to the situation and encouraged students to "push back" against our joint approach while also acknowledging that we were neither willing nor able to impose a single solution that would serve all student needs and maintain a socially just educational environment for everyone involved. As a microcosm of the lived realities of students of Color and other marginalized groups, it was not the resulting outcome that was most essential, but the process of reflection, deconstruction, and acknowledgement of racialized tensions that provided the essential CRT discourse.

After the journal reflection was read out loud by the lead instructor of the instructional team, the silence in the room was stunning. Slowly, students began to nervously talk about their reactions and narrated the difficulty of "doing" CRT in the midst of learning about CRT. As students

struggled to find their voices and embody race consciousness as called for by CRT, the tensions in the room, although not resolved, dissipated enough to allow dialogue. In this vein, as students and instructors, we all embodied CRT as a theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical practice that made the murky nature of race and racism work more clear, while identifying additional opportunities for CRT study by educational scholars. For example, as instructors, we resisted having been taught to embody an authoritative presence, despite the opportunity and explicit requests from our students to do so. In this context, albeit difficult and time consuming, we aligned ourselves with CRT to decidedly inhibit offering a definitive solution that would surely carry racialized consequences over the duration of the course. Likewise, by drawing upon the selection of learning teams as an opportunity to learn from their own actions and desires, students were able to witness CRT as theory, pedagogical practice, and method. In doing so, we encourage education scholars to ask, "What is at stake in educational classrooms beyond the traditional concerns with enticing students to read and write?" and "How can CRT in action in classroom settings foster new knowledge about how race and racism work in education?"

Conclusion: Moving from Theory to Practice

Critical race theory, as an oppositional framework, offers multiple opportunities for fostering student reflection and identity development while concomitantly offering a means to critique embedded hegemonic systems in the United States. Classroom experiences serve well as an exploratory environment for students to engage in problematizing the issues of race to explore not only societal constructs, but

also the individual critically raced reality. This reality translates in and out of the classroom in different ways for different students, and relies on the facilitation of an instructor (or instructors) who is sensitive to the challenge and can support students through the reflexive work required in a hyper-racialized CRT environment.

Returning to Yosso's (2002) description of what instructors of a CRT course should strive to do, this experience allowed us to openly acknowledge the intersections of racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism and the potential to reinforce subordination through curricular structures and practices (Yosso's Tenet 1), in something as simple as a group selection process. The instructional team made a conscious decision to use this "teachable moment" as an opportunity to invite students to explore their individual and collective lived experiences via CRT tenets. Often, instructors may fear turning a critical lens toward their own classroom based on the understandable desire to not lose control. There is also a tendency to look outside of our own personal educational contexts to apply the very principles and practices for which we advocate. However, our "teachable moment" gave us an ideal situation in which students could make connections between their own assumptions related to race and racism, and explore how those assumptions came to life right before our eyes. Embracing transparency and vulnerability, the instructional team was jointly intrigued, nervous, and frightened by the potentially explosive outcome of turning CRT inward as a lens through which to theorize our classroom so early on in the course—especially because this was the first Critical Race Theory in Education course to be offered on our campus, the Black male professor had yet to earn tenure, and the doctoral candidates were at the ABD ("all

but dissertation") stage. In hindsight, doing so was risky, to be sure—but also became an essential, embodied element of our commitment to CRT as theory, pedagogy, and method.

Most importantly, this "teachable moment" allowed us to critically question dominant social discourses regarding race and ethnicity and provoke social consciousness (Yosso's Tenet 2 and Tenet 3) by providing our students with an oppositional discourse to apply to their group selection process. Specifically, students were able to hear each other's perspectives on how and in what ways race mattered for them individually and collectively. We were also able to create a space for counterstories that refute dominant expressions of "truth" and "reality" (Yosso's Tenet 4). For example, in its second meeting, students in the class challenged and debated their notions related to race neutrality and colorblindness. At the same time, they could hear how, for some students, the CRT idea that racism exists every day and everywhere—their classroom space included—was not "just" a theoretical concept. Students and teachers used course readings immediately following this in-class experience to link CRT to educational practices and societal inequities (Yosso's Tenet 5). These teachable moments provided an invaluable learning opportunity for the past, present, and future students in this course, who can draw upon the lived experiences of this inaugural group. Ultimately, by engaging in action research to make meaning of our lived experiences as an instructional team, we now have a significantly stronger foundation and knowledge base that will enable us to better fulfill the course's end goal of social consciousness, social transformation, and social justice.

In closing, it was through embracing the racialized tensions that CRT requires and compels society to grapple with that we enacted CRT in the classroom. This pedagogical approach to acknowledging the sociopolitical contexts in which we were (and continue to be) situated proved to be an essential learning tool that we drew upon throughout the course. For us, the ultimate, enduring understanding is that embracing the tensions was also the most authentic means to acknowledge that our work within and beyond classrooms is not divested of

our identities, nor the endemic nature of oppressions in U.S. American society. Rather, as educators, we felt personally, politically, and intellectually obligated to openly struggle in, with, and through the tensions we encountered. Our ability to elucidate and learn from (rather than ignore, dismiss, or definitively resolve) the tensions of real-world racialized conflicts at the center of our course potentiated the practice of using CRT to explore teachable moments as an educationally transformative opportunity.

Notes

1. Tuitt (2008) has advocated the use of “traditionally” opposed to “predominantly” White because “PWI [predominantly white institution] would not include those higher education institutions whose campus populations have been predominantly white but now have students of color in the numeric majority. I argue that even though institutions like MIT and Berkley have more students of color than whites on campus, the culture, tradition, and values found in those institutions remain traditionally white” (pp. 192-193).

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