

## **Advocacy for Diversity Begins with the Self: Unleashing Silenced Stories: A Duoethnographic Account**

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### **Abstract**

This paper introduces the research methodology duoethnography as a viable tool or strategy to get at the underlying biases and assumptions that both a Black and White teacher/researcher hold. How we teach for diversity was the central topic of our duoethnography, however, this evolved into a series of dialogues where we came to question our own practice. Through the mutual creation of a respectful space we were able to speak about race from a critical position. Through a poetic analysis of the data, the shared themes of unleashing our own silenced stories, wrestling through our different interpretations of empathy versus sympathy while continually moving toward a place of vulnerability where we both felt welcomed and validated, emerged. Our work came to a turning point at the White Privilege Symposium at Brock University where Hilary Brown came face to face with what it means to be a recovering racist, and where Dolana Mogadime found a home where she was unafraid to talk openly about race and racism. The duoethnographic dialogues created the foundation where both authors are ready to change.

*Keywords:* White privilege; Duoethnography; Teacher education; Race and gender; Higher education; Critical race studies; Black feminism

Hilary Brown, Ph. D., is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Brock University. She is the recipient of the 2012 Brock University Award for Excellence in teaching for Early Career Faculty. Hilary uses duoethnography as a pedagogical tool to encourage her students to delve deeply into the self in order to both expose as well as reconcile their vulnerabilities around the concept of diversity.

Dolana Mogadime, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education, Joint Ph.D. in Educational Studies Graduate Program Director, and an affiliate of the Social Justice Research Institute (SJRI) at Brock University in St. Catharines Ontario, Canada. Dolana's research interests are in social justice, equity studies and feminist theories.

We are both academics working in the Faculty of Education at Brock University in southern Ontario, Canada. Dolana, a Black teacher/researcher whose activist academic work spans generations, teaches in the Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education while Hilary, a White teacher/researcher, has taught in the Department of Teacher Education for over a decade. Our collaboration was initiated through our genuine interest in fostering critical democracy and social justice (Solomon & Singer, 2011) in our respective classrooms. Our initial casual discussions centered on the ways in which we teach for diversity. We challenged one another regarding the use of that term and believed our students needed to know and understand the complexities that are now connected to the notion of diversity. What emerged following these discussions and debates was that we are both heavily invested in anti-oppressive education that encapsulates diversity with equity, feminism, and the ability to think critically (Kumashiro, 2015). At this point, our discussions evolved into a series of formal respectful dialogues where we came to question our own practice. (The process will be described in more depth later in the paper.) In order to formalize our process, we adopted the research methodology duoethnography, which “is a collaborative research methodology in which two or more researchers of difference juxtapose their life histories to provide multiple understandings of the world” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 9). We felt that duoethnography, if conducted with vigilance, would “challenge and potentially disrupt the metanarrative of self at the personal level by questioning held beliefs” (p. 15). In addition, if conducted respectfully, duoethnography had the potential to provide the space for us to practice critical humility.

Critical humility is “the practice of remaining open to the fact that our knowledge is partial and evolving while at the same time being committed to speaking up and taking action in the world based on our current knowledge, however imperfect” (Barlas et al., 2012, p. 2). In order to get to the point where we could practice critical humility, we had to create a safe, respectful space where difference could both be honored as well as encouraged to flourish. In a nutshell, this is the ebb and flow we moved through without fully understanding the paradox of remaining open while still challenging the assumptions and biases of our research partner. In fact, it wasn’t until months after the process came to an end that we realized the following: The shared meeting space we created through meaningful dialogue, was, in fact, the stimulus for building a safe space. That safe space was central for allowing us to become transparent with one another about the challenges, pain, and joys that we constantly experience as educators whose pedagogy can produce resistance among our students. This paper undertakes an in-depth analysis of our dialogue(s) and highlights significant moments within that safe space that helped us unravel our understandings of what it means to prepare ourselves to teach in diverse settings.

### **Beginnings**

To accomplish our objective, we first had to acknowledge and interrogate our unique curriculum, which is the first tenet of duoethnography. In duoethnography, the body is the site of knowledge. It reflects Pinar’s (2004) notion of *currenere* where the duoethnographer’s life embodies a living, breathing curriculum. Therefore, our life histories became the site of the research. Within our personal curriculum we became committed to interrogating ourselves

through “Our Other.” We coined a new phrase, “Our Other,” instead of “The Other.” The notion of our other has organically arisen out of the collaborative work that is featured in the present article. We realize the common understanding and use of the word “Othering” is embedded historically and politically through colonization and White supremacy. No doubt, othering as a form of oppression has been forced upon entire populations due to colonization and imperialism. It emerges in contemporary times as racism and discrimination that is reflective of a collective reality. We advance the view that othering is also experienced in the personal, in that it is at the personal level that we seek (through our work together) to disrupt how individuals “other” one another. Albeit, given that Hilary is White and Dolana is Black, we seek to examine how historical continuities surface (but in very different ways) in our discussions with one another. When Hilary examines gender and patriarchy, it becomes a means to interrupting White male dominance historically defined through colonization and imperialism. When Dolana assumes Hilary has “bought into these societal scripts” but then is shocked to see she has not, Dolana has to interrupt her own perceived notions of Hilary as a White women who has taken up these ideas without critical examination. Dolana realized the importance of coining the new phrase “Our Other” because it signals a shared othering. That is, we both engage in critiquing the process of othering one another. We are transparent in owning up to our own limitations and preconceived ideas about one another. We want to engage with a critical dialogue regarding these limitations in a way that will support mutual understanding and growth. Our conversations provided space and time for us to explore and investigate our past, in light of our present work as teacher educators, with a focused hope to use these

conversations as a means to transform our future work. In essence, we used our personal stories to define what we mean when we talk about diversity in our classrooms. Throughout this paper, we unearth our stories, and as we do so we describe the duoethnographic process in a “show and tell” fashion unveiling the eight tenets in action, so that you, the reader, can imagine how this methodology may be adopted to explore your own living, breathing, teaching curriculum. In doing so, we may bring you to a better understanding of self so that you can effectively meet the needs of the students you teach in diverse settings.

### **Safe Space: The Rose**

**R**eadiness  
**O**penness  
**S**haring  
**E**mpyting

Dolana created the metaphor of The Rose. She writes in an email between our formal dialogues:

I like the idea of using the rose because it has a meditative quality: Can we approach conversations with this knowledge of our inner rose as sacred? Can we enter into spaces of care, listening, and empathy, by knowing the rose is our focus? Can we draw from its strength? It is yet another metaphor in teaching and there are many Hil ... beyond all the toxic spaces we otherwise inhibit. We need conscious teaching based on inner principles. (personal communication)

She goes on to explain what each letter represents in the acronym:

**Readiness.** Readiness to listen, and to hear

**Openness.** Openness to speak about our emotions, what makes us angry (sometimes about what we are saying); melancholy (our personal, political, institutional struggles with the status quo); happy (with our inner resources that help us to think and be beyond these limitations and give us the ability to know what is important and life sustaining)

**Sharing.** Sharing what we know and believe (our life stories, histories and relationships with significant others)

**Emptying.** Emptying our authentic self without fear while knowing we will honor each other's views (though we might not agree)

This is what duoethnography asks of us, to find a partner who has a different perspective on a topic so that both people can arrive at a better understanding across this difference. In our dialogues, we came to know and realize that this new understanding can only be attained while remaining in a state of critical humility. This parallels what “The Rose” demands of us: to dialogue poised ready to listen, to come prepared to be open to speaking up, to share what we know, and do so without fear. This is the space we created for one another. By keeping “The Rose” at the center of our process we were able to maintain a high level of critical humility, especially in those moments where difference coupled with disagreement bubbled to the surface.

### **The Duoethnographic Process**

We met monthly over the course of eight months in Hilary’s office for an hour-

long dialogue initially focused on our experiences of teaching the subject matter of diversity to others. Hilary transcribed each monthly dialogue and shared the transcript with Dolana. We then analyzed the data separately in the weeks between each dialogue, and if necessary we followed up with an email that provided more in-depth information on a theme. This process allowed us to arrive at our subsequent dialogue prepared to further interrogate content that had emerged from the previous dialogue. Themes such as unleashing our own silenced stories, moving towards vulnerability, and coming to an opposing understanding of sympathy and empathy, are but three examples of critical themes that were deeply interrogated as a result of our duoethnographic process.

At the end of the eight-month research project, Hilary reread the transcripts and email exchanges and carried out a synthesis of her duoethnographic experience writing found poetry (Butler-Kisber, 2002, 2005; Prendergast, 2006). She selected emergent themes, issues, tensions, and questions that were reiterated throughout the dialogues and fashioned them on the page in a poetic structure by changing spacing, as well as italicization, color, and bolding of text so that both researchers’ voices were present. Duoethnography by its very nature is polyvocal and dialogic (second tenet) and, hence, when writing a duoethnography the voice of each participant is made explicit during the research process (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). When Dolana critically responded to Hilary’s found poetry using track changes, along with Hilary, she was also initiating the third tenet of duoethnography, which is disrupting the metanarratives we consciously or unconsciously hold (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). In this research, the juxtaposition of

our own unique stories or living curricula that we chose to disclose has an inherent third space (Bhabha, 1994) where the stories could potentially be restored. This could only occur because the fourth tenet was present and that was that the difference between us, with regards to teaching for diversity, had been clearly articulated from the outset.

Through the process of writing found poetry, our difference was clearly illustrated and this pivotal document or “poetic inquiry” (Prendergast, 2006) became the heart of our analysis that allowed us to move into a more formal critique of both of our own understandings of diversity, as well as coming to understand how to guide our students to deeply understand their own notions of diversity.

First and foremost, we needed to critique our own practice, hence ourselves, before we could determine if how we presently teach for diversity is satisfactory. In essence, you cannot teach anyone anything, but you can guide people through processes that they may adopt. In doing so they may unearth their own biases and assumptions and in turn foster critical democracy and social justice in their own respective classrooms. But before we can guide anyone we must come to a deeper understanding of self and in doing so acknowledge our own positionality.

### **The Initial Poem – Hilary’s Surface Understanding of Diversity**

In the following found poetry, Hilary juxtaposes Dolana’s words, thoughts, and beliefs with her own. Hilary’s words, thoughts, and beliefs are in italics, however, at times she interjects questions as she analyzes the data through the creation of the

found poem. This mode of analysis transgresses a Western model of writing that demands an indication of “who says what.” At times, our voices blend and the lines of “who says what” get blurred. This is a result of two dynamics playing out simultaneously: first, the connection we forged through an honest interrogation of each other’s beliefs, values, and worldviews for over eight months, which invited us to respectfully challenge one another; and second, the poetic form itself, which allowed us to rework our tensions and revise our positions in a new way. This will be discussed in more depth further on in the paper. This initial process allowed Hilary to get to the heart of the matter and bring to the surface the tensions she experienced as she participated in the duoethnographic dialogue.

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## Is Teaching for Diversity a Sensibility?

### Am I an ally?

Some women get co-opted into the  
 “metanarrative.”  
 Critical consciousness – critical language.

*Can we teach empowerment? Or  
 does someone have to come to this herself?*

*We see the world differently,  
 how could we not? Our lived experiences  
 guide us or dictate what we see in the world.*

Queens and Princesses  
 Fairy Tales  
 Romantic stories  
 Empathy – power over or  
 walking a mile in another person’s  
 shoes?  
 Amazon Woman  
 Patriarchy  
 Independence  
 No fairy tale here

**Foreign stories of fairy tales, men sweeping  
 women off their feet.**

**I feel uncomfortable it does not work for me.**

**Have I been co-opted into this metanarrative?**

Shock.  
 Surprise.  
 Insight.

*Embodied Notion of Beauty Versus  
 Society’s Projection of Beauty.*

*Stories we were sewn into.*

**“Who are you as a human being?”**

Not a person of color,

*or gender,  
or age,  
or sexual orientation*

but rather a skeleton of soulfulness  
that can be seen from behind a  
curtain,

*naked,  
bare,  
transparent.*

We are not our gender.  
We are not our age.  
We are not our race.  
We are not our religion.  
We are not our sexuality.

*We are human beings.*

**“How do you self identify?”**

As a human being.

**“That is not specific enough.”**

I quickly search my own personal database. What is the opposite of feminine? I see myself as an Amazon woman. The physical representation of the body ... not feminine rather non-feminized, yes, I am an Amazon woman.

*I am an Amazon woman.*

**“You cannot be an Amazon woman you are not Indigenous.”**

What? I am a strong, resourceful and a brave woman. What does Indigenous have to do with it? After all in Greek Mythology the Amazons were a force to be reckoned with and so am I. But did the fierce female warriors really exist? They do inside

of me and nobody can take that away  
from me ... nobody ... it is a story I  
identify with. Silencing is not  
acceptable.

*Stories can silence.  
Silence can story.  
Silences can protect.  
Silences can harm.  
Transparency is the  
resolution, the reconciliation,  
the retribution.  
Both at home and in the  
classroom.  
A burden lifted.  
A soul freed.  
Nothing to hide.  
An authentic way to live and  
to love.*

This is how I teach for diversity  
through an infusion of race,

*class,  
gender,  
sexuality,  
ability,  
disability,  
religion,  
as well as different forms of  
discrimination and  
oppression.*

Teaching or living diversity?

*For me they are one and the  
same, both an ontology and  
an epistemology.*

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### **How do you teach for diversity?**

I came to Canada from South Africa  
as a refugee from a system of Apartheid that  
pitted people against each other based on  
race. White people were on top. They

benefitted in every way possible  
(economically, financially). I became hard  
wired for resisting these kinds of powering  
experiences that tried to regulate me and  
control me.



“I am a woman not to be controlled!”

I carry an understanding of discrimination, sense of the lived impacts of racial violence, and oppression. Race is a site of struggle for me but it ought to be site of empowerment. I challenge it through Critical Race Theory (CRT).

I did not grow up under patriarchy. I have two mothers. I never once said they were lesbians... they have never self-identified as such. I thought I made this clear. Was I heard?

RESPECT for the other is how I operate in the world. I was empowered to be a self-sufficient, tolerant, accepting, a kind human being. I was both acknowledged and well-regarded for my athleticism. I viewed myself as a strong capable human being. Not necessarily a capable woman. There is a distinction.

I became an assertive person not realizing the monolithic dominant oppressive notion of what a nuclear family is and what it ought to be. I challenge the status quo.

### **Critical thinking, what is it?**

Can we teach it?

Can we guide students through an anti-oppression and anti-discriminatory approach to curriculum?

Do they trust me?

Have I earned their trust?

How do I get them to want to share their stories?

Sharing my story.

It is simple as 1 ... 2 ... 3 ... after all stories beget stories.

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### **I embody EMPATHY and so do you:**

**Empathy as pity.** I want to make sense of human behavior.

**Empathy as a relation of power over the other.** I want people to feel welcome in the world.

**Empathy as that which makes the person having it feel superior to the other.** I strive to make people to feel whole not less than.

**Ultimately, empathy is walking a mile in another person’s shoes.** Through empathy I began to understand just how differently we view the world.

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A truly strong woman brings other women up – their self-concept and self-esteem.

A truly strong woman rises up with another woman to become a part of a collective – she represents the counternarrative to individualism, politics, and power relations that undercut another woman.

A truly strong woman recognizes her strengths and provides supports for other women on the journey recognizing her own strengths (self-understanding).

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### **How did we arrive at our positions?**

Vulnerability and power and choice. It comes down to owning or knowing our power.

### What choices are we going to make when we have power over others?

I think by talking about issues of race I feel often times powerless ironically even as a Black woman. Why is that?

**Action.** How do we provoke teacher candidates to explore the biases and assumptions they carry with them that could explicitly or implicitly influence their practice and oppress and/or marginalize another?

*You are explicitly political ~  
It is a political project.* I am not overtly political.

*Advocacy.*

*Dominance.*

*Oppression. Teaching  
with story brings out  
marginalized groups.*

*Discrimination.*

*Living within  
contradictions we still heard  
each other – through respect.*

We have the same end goal  
but we approach it differently.

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Poetic representation of the selected data helped to create “new ways of seeing and understanding [the] phenomena” of diversity (Butler-Kisber, 2005, p. 108). In a research context, it is referred to as “poetic transcription” (Richardson, 2002) or “poetic inquiry” (Prendergast, 2006). By using found poetry, Hilary was able to take words, phrases, and thoughts from the transcripts

and restructure them in poetic form to help her (and subsequently Dolana) to both represent research findings, as well as penetrate the text to make meaning from the eight-month process. It allowed us to move out of the data and make our individual beliefs, values, and experiences more explicit and more accessible as we searched for a way through the complexity of our individual stories in order to articulate how they play out in our teaching.

### Dolana’s Critical Response

In this section we juxtapose sections of Hilary’s poem that Dolana chose to critically respond to. Keep in mind three aspects of this process as you read the critical response. First, remember that the initial found poem itself—even though the words were selected by Hilary—contained both Dolana’s and Hilary’s thoughts, words, beliefs, and values that Hilary pulled from the transcripts. Second, what Dolana chose to respond to were either Hilary’s thoughts or her own. Third, both Dolana and Hilary are further seeking clarification in what each person means. This notion of asking one another questions, waiting for the response, and being open to listening and hearing can support deeper understanding regarding the positionality that each brings to teaching.

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**Hilary:** Am I an ally?

**Dolana:** This is a critical question we need to constantly and consistently ask ourselves. It’s a never-ending question that keeps our practice focused on what we believe in. Our notion of diversity as well as that of our students requires an articulated position from which we live and labor toward. It is recognizing systems of oppression that operate in our everyday lives (whether that

be in relation to racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, or classism) it is understanding that all these forms of oppression work in concert with one another in ways that uphold elitism, privilege, and entitlement for those in positions of power over those who have less power. Having knowledge of that means we have at least four principles to uphold:

1. Duty to identify our privilege.
2. Duty to unlearn how those privileges oppress others.
3. Duty to advocate for breaking silences within those positions of marginality that we embody by virtue of our localities.
4. Duty to advocate for positions across differences that we have come to learn through listening to narrative stories that interrupt hegemonic “truth” claims.

**Hilary:** Some women get co-opted into the “metanarrative.”

**Dolana:** “Metanarratives or grand narratives are paradigmatic systems of knowledge that contain established and credible worldviews”... they provide the basis of truth claims. The notion of questioning received truths (Enlightenment, progress, etc.) signals the postmodern condition (see Appelrouth & Edles, 2012).

**Hilary:** Foreign stories of fairy tales, men sweeping women off their feet.

**Dolana:** We shared how Western traditional stories construct hegemonic femininity that becomes unconsciously reproduced into tropes “representing women as in need of saving.”... But Hilary, why do you identify

them as foreign? Given that these tropes represent Western patriarchal society, they are not foreign to Western society. ... What did you mean by foreign? Thinking back to our dialogues, I wonder if you perceive these stories as “strange” or far removed from the way you personally grew up. However, I think those metanarratives are the stuff of little girlhood, which can potentially be subsumed unconsciously and normalized, but are to be resisted if women are to be free of patriarchal dominance. However, that requires an awakening within the individual through critical consciousness raising by way of not just experience but also through teaching and learning. ... Hilary, perhaps you grew up in a context in which that awakened consciousness was just part of how you were raised by your two moms?

*These are traditional Victorian stories of*

*Stories we*

*womanhood that have been normalized in*

*were sewn*

*fairytale...*

*into*

*While we resisted them...*

**Hilary:** How do you self-identify?

*As a human being.*

**Dolana:** We need “both/and” sensibilities. I say this because, while I believe this statement to be true—“I identify as a human being”—we also need to recognize how society constructs us in relation to social

categories that limit us. These social categorizations and hierarchies are defined by colonialism and are intended to separate and segregate the “others” from White supremacist-centered definitions. It’s only with that critical recognition that we can then do the hard work of “diversity” educators in advocating for social change and equity. ... If we are all the same—“as a human being”—how do I distinguish where the inequities are? How do we thereby insist (through laws, policies, and economics) on change? Within the Canadian contexts we can refer to the text by Henry and Tator (2010) whose research into the making of racism in Canadian society is seminal. We need critical consciousness and a critique of the social processes that dehumanize us ... those that rob us of being human.

**Hilary:** They do inside of me and nobody can take that away from me ... nobody.

**Dolana:** Hilary, I think my notion in raising this question was to ask you where these tropes originate? As a graduate student, I studied the work of Foucault—the genealogy of a word is central to recognizing how the images, symbols, and metaphors we hold in our imagination are in discourse with historical realities. ... What I was suggesting was that it is part of the colonial project to co-opt indigenous ways of knowing and then refashion them for Western consumption. ... I think we all have to be critical of how we use these tropes in our daily lives, both consciously or unconsciously, and be ready and able to engage in the work of genealogy without which we reinsert the colonial project of “eating the other” which bell hooks would say is Eurocentric supremacy at its best because it’s unconscious.

**Hilary:** Stories can silence.

**Dolana:** It is hard to take on the position of critiquing our way of meaning making, especially when it challenges what we hold as dear or important (especially to our self-definition).

Hilary, my intent was not to silence, but actually to engage you in digging further. We all have silenced stories. ... None of us are immune to them. But the question for me is, which ones are we going to tell and for what purpose? We need to ask ourselves: How can telling my story be of benefit to someone else? Especially to my students? Hilary, do you think that learning about an unexamined colonial narrative operating in your own life will help to challenge your students to see what they take for granted in their own lives? ... I realize that you might not like my question.

**Hilary:** Transparency is the resolution, the reconciliation, the retribution.

**Dolana:** We take risks in telling our stories, in disclosing hidden realities. It’s not always freeing to tell these stories. I can tell them, but then I worry about how they will be received. My stories of racism and discrimination can be received with disbelief, or guilt and shame. My students are mostly White, middle-class women. Racism may have not been an experience they have had or are willing to listen to. Therefore, I silence and censure my own stories. I choose not to tell.

**Hilary:** How has the experience of being a refugee impacted upon you?

**Dolana:** Being a refugee is a silenced identity. It’s something I have not told anyone about until now in our work together. “Refugee” can invoke “them” and “us” stereotypical negative connotations. For example, “them” can be constructed as

“poor, defenseless, and needy.” “Us” can be constructed as “benevolent sympathizers with those people who have come to ‘our’ country Canada in need.” I worry about how I would be perceived by my White, mostly middle-class students if they knew my family arrived in Canada as refugees. At the same time, my family may have been refugees when we left South Africa for Zambia, then Zambia for Canada for political reasons, but my father was a medical doctor, which signals class mobility for the “few” amongst the wider Black population. I wrote and published on that family history as part of my graduate research.

**Hilary:** From what you told me, during Apartheid South Africa, White South Africans benefitted in every way possible (economically, financially). How was your family impacted?

**Dolana:** Our stories are complex. When we dig deep we have to acknowledge that complexity. For example, I have to acknowledge that the maternal side of my family were highly educated, professional Christians. That provided access to education, that access situated them differentially in relation to the colonial project that restricted education and class mobility for the majority Black South African people. At the same time, the matrilineal stories I have heard about my family tell a narrative of a people that advocated for social change for the majority. That is, they used their education to contribute to social upliftment for their people who lived in poverty and were disenfranchised.

**Hilary:** What sensibilities do you bring from these experiences to your work?

**Dolana:** I became hardwired for resisting these kinds of power over “other” experiences that tried to regulate and control Black people. This subject position of challenging silences does not necessarily bode well in the academy. I find that if I speak from my own marginality as a Black female or if I resist notions of being a token (this advocacy work unsettles my colleagues’ perceptions that hiring me or two, or even four, Black females is enough). Being content in fitting in, putting up and shutting up, because I “made it” is not sufficient for me, my inclusion does not represent the full inclusion of Black intellectuals when the majority have been shut out...I rub up against my colleagues’ notion of inclusion when I insist on equity in representation among the professoriate.

**Hilary:** You talk about teaching race as a site of struggle for you, what do you mean?

**Dolana:** Articulating about race and racism ought to be a site for coming to voice. When we talk about teaching critical language to our students we often frame it that way, that coming to voice ought to be a site for empowerment. However, my experiences are different in that I might embody an understanding of race and racism, but my colleagues have denied my expertise on numerous occasions. An embodied understanding and academic contribution does not lead to acknowledged expertise. It is far easier for a White colleague to “do diversity,” to be recognized as a “diversity scholar” and “diversity expert” than it is for a Black intellectual who does the same type of scholarship or even surpasses his or her White colleagues.

**Hilary:** Empathy as pity...

**Dolana:** Our practice has to undergo constant and insistent scrutiny. Without this

type of scrutiny, it is very easy to fall into the trap of being a sympathizer instead of embodying an empathetic understanding across differences. I also think empathy is not just a feeling, but also an action because "Tears are not enough" (Adams, Vallance, & Foster, 2007). We need to act based on that "feeling" of empathy, and social participation on the ground is required as part of the process. In other words, we can't just be satisfied with feeling. We need to stand up for what we believe and bring about change through positive social change work on the ground.

**Hilary:** Action: How do we provoke teacher candidates to explore the biases and assumptions they carry with them that could explicitly or implicitly influence their practice and oppress and/or marginalize another?

**Dolana:** Being an advocate of diversity includes unleashing our own silenced stories, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, allowing ourselves to be challenged by one another, learning to extend our own thinking, realizing humility is central, recognizing that unlearning is a strength, and understanding that critical self-examination through duoethnography is a means to tapping into a common meeting ground where we can be more fully human.

### **Reconceptualizing diversity moving from human to both/and understandings**

Themes emerged from the data, but due to our differences the themes that emerged were interpreted differently. You can hear Hilary's anger in the first iteration of the poem. She questions whether she was heard or not. This is the challenge of duoethnography: When differences are present, this gives the duoethnographers an opportunity to question "meanings held

about the past and invite reconceptualization" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 24), which is the fifth tenet of duoethnography. The sixth and seventh tenets flow from the notion that reconceptualization is necessary, and they are that "universal truths are not sought" (p. 24) and that this reconceptualization is a "form of praxis where theory and practice converse" (p. 24). The final tenet reflects the negotiated space one enters when undergoing a duoethnography and the ethical stance that requires participants to be deliberately vigilant. This process is not for everyone. It requires a deep commitment to both one's partner and more importantly oneself. To move towards reconceptualization, one has to acknowledge that she or he does not have a complete understanding of the topic she or he is immersed in. Hilary came to the realization that her personal metaphors were laden with colonial structures that she had never considered critiquing in the past. She never once questioned their initial representation, but rather accepted them at face value.

Dolana came to know that preconceived ideas about femininity that are constructed from White, middle-class patriarchy have been resisted within stories of Hilary's family and her stories of growing up with her two moms. We learned that the shared space was one in which we could both grow in our understanding across racial, cultural, and gendered identity. This leads us to the first theme.

### **Unleashing Our Own Silences Stories**

The first theme that was unveiled was our silenced stories. While in "The Rose" space the utterances we shared were reflections we held close to our hearts that we hadn't shared with our work colleagues. We talked about life in the academy, our

home lives, body politics, relationships, our teaching, our students, and the list goes on. But the subtext of our lives, our currere, reveals its own story embedded in the stories we chose to share. Even when we thought we were protecting ourselves by, for example, describing the armor we wear (Hilary), or the silenced stories of pain and exclusion (Dolana) we revealed an inner truth.

**Hilary:** I hid behind the armor of the Amazon woman, a woman I admired for her physical prowess, only to find out that I held a racist colonized view, one I was certain I did not hold. When I was five, I was told by my grandmother not to play with Wendy, “the Indian girl.” I played with Wendy anyway. It was at that moment I understood that adults could be wrong about a people. This was one reason I was sure I did not hold a colonized view of the world. I was naïve.

As I continued to delve deeper into my unconscious bias, I attended the White Privilege Symposium Canada for academics and activists advocating for equity, justice, and action (Brock University, 2016). It was during a workshop at this symposium that I was told that by virtue of being born White, from the day of my birth onwards, I was a “recovering racist” (Traoré, 2016). The same anger that I experienced when I was being challenged for embodying an Indigenous Amazon woman bubbled to the surface. What does it mean to be a recovering racist? What does it mean to be White?

I have come to realize I was born with an unearned advantage (McIntosh, 2015) by virtue of being born with white skin. But it is more than skin deep. Structural racism trickles into every facet of our lives, starting with the structures that

reproduce a colonized view that reinforces ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. Through duoethnography, a blind spot has been exposed, and I have just begun to grapple with how my White privilege has allowed me to navigate the world with relative ease. I am uncomfortable in the knowing, but grateful that Dolana has helped me to see the systemic racialized society that has advantaged me over another. Teaching for diversity is teaching for social justice when I recognize these systems of oppression and disrupt them. This is the platform from which I continue to work and teach. However, now social justice has new meaning for me as I continue to formulate a deeper understanding of how incomplete I am within this system of knowing. I need to keep doing this work as I guide other White teacher education instructors to do the same.

**Dolana:** I was holding on to stories of patriarchy and dominance as manifest through male abuse. Having grown up in period of time when physical abuse of women was tolerated in South Africa, I bore witness to the impact of male violence firsthand. I struggled with telling such stories because they were silenced by a society that had condoned it. Male violence remained hidden and locked into my childhood memories of growing up. But as Hilary and I continued our conversations, I revealed the long-held silenced stories of pain and abuse to Hilary. I began unleashing my silenced stories little by little, but wondered if I could reveal them beyond the safety of the shared dialogical meeting space we had created.

### **Moving Towards Vulnerability**

The second theme that emerged from the data was how we moved toward our own vulnerability. We did so by negotiating and transforming “The Rose” space with each

subsequent dialogue. We found that the more often we dialogued, the deeper we penetrated our own biases and assumptions, allowing our partner to question and probe previously held beliefs. We were both open to this kind of microexamination since, as we mentioned at the outset, this was an extension of our desire to foster critical democracy and social justice in our respective classrooms. Moving toward vulnerability can cause discomfort. However, working with a duoethnographic partner who was willing to remain open while still challenging held assumptions and biases through the act of critical humility allowed us to break through our armor in such a way that we both still felt protected. Moving towards vulnerability was a delicate dance.

**Hilary:** Dolana respectfully asks probing questions such as: “Hilary, do you think that learning about an unexamined colonial narrative operating in your own life will help to challenge your students to see what they take for granted in their own lives? ... I realize that you might not like my question ...” Dolana pushes me, I imagine, because she realizes that there is “White resistance to White privilege” (Ferber, 2015, p. 34). Dolana ends her critical probe with an ellipsis. This use of punctuation is purposeful. It marks for me that she needs to ask the question. This is something she cannot not do. I respect that. Dolana asks in spite of being unsure of how her words will be received. Perhaps she believes that since “The Rose” space has been co-created, that upon receiving the email I will be poised ready to listen, I will be open to speaking up, I will be prepared to share what I know, and do so without fear, in the same way Dolana positioned herself in her query. This is what is required when moving towards vulnerability; it is to trust our Other without fear of how it will be received. Our dialogue

speaks to our mutual scholarly responsibility to talk about White privilege, and our necessary reconciliation toward equity and a deep awareness of self. This is where vulnerability resides. It resides in the quiet, internal, invisible spaces of the self and this is where, through our Other, I found a way to allow my vulnerabilities to surface and be acknowledged as I moved towards reconciliation with myself as a recovering racist.

I have carried this sensibility into the classroom. When I returned from the White Privilege Symposium Canada (September, 2016), I shared my experience with my Bachelor of Education students. In addition to sharing the inspiring keynote addresses and workshops I attended, there was one incident that left me feeling disappointed with myself. Unfulfilled. I removed my jacket to expose the “unlearn” t-shirt I had bought. Then I shared the following story with the class:

Unbeknownst to me when I bought this t-shirt, which is a global movement, the text ‘unlearn’ had purposefully been placed on the inside where the seams and the tags were fully exposed.” As I pointed to the text (“unlearn” on the front and, “Warning: change happens from the inside out” on the back), I continued, “This is so clever—but I messed up. I cut the tags off. I normalized the t-shirt. I did not realize the power of leaving tags where they were purposefully sewn on. Now when I wear this t-shirt, I look like everyone else. This goes against the impetus behind the unlearn inside-out t-shirt, which was manufactured to expose the tags. The tags are a metaphor for revealing what is normally hidden—like, for example, White supremacy,



which is the routine maintenance of White privilege. Keeping the tags hanging out would have provided me with an opportunity to be stopped by total strangers wanting to know what the message of the t-shirt was all about. I missed out on engaging in dialogue with folks. They may have asked, ‘What does unlearn mean?’ They may have simply wanted to say, ‘Hey, your tags are showing.’” This was a missed opportunity for me to commit myself to speaking up and taking action as I attempt to disrupt normative discourses. When we walk through the world with our tags out, we recognize the value for human interaction and dialogue.

What did I learn by cutting off the tags? I learned that my current knowledge is imperfect, that I am a work in progress, and that I am a recovering racist held in suspension in the routine maintenance of White privilege. Deep inside I want to wear my tags out, but yet when given the chance I immediately cut them off. How do I break through this barrier? To unlearn, I first have to unlearn. I need to continue doing this work myself, alongside my teacher candidates. I have to unlearn. As long as I continue to be open, transparent, and honest in my imperfections, this moving towards vulnerability, which is what I believe to be critical humility-in-action, may be the impetus for my teacher candidates to question their values and beliefs. In sum, I have to unlearn.

**Dolana:** As I continued to tell my unleashed childhood memories, they started to sound similar in feeling to the pain and exclusion of being the only Black person in the room as a university teacher. Exclusion is a violation; it represents a power imbalance. Although I may be the university teacher, it

was easy for a student to hurl hurt-filled words across a lecture hall toward me, for the rest of the students in the classroom to bear witness to such an act, and for me to undergo the same intense sense of abuse I had undergone as a child. On one such occasion I left the lecture hall in tears. I realized the only way I should or could respond was through compassion, love, and humility. As Hilary drew from her memory of a childhood friend to help her think about race, I drew from the compassion, care, and support I had received from my kindergarten teacher. My teacher was a young, British, White woman who embarked upon a teaching assignment abroad in Zambia, Africa. Once in her class, I had become a child whom she cared to know and held compassion for. Amid the instances of male violence occurring at home, my teacher had given me a sense of safety and security in the class. It was that sense of caring that I could bring to my interactions with my White female students of today. In moving toward and opening up about both instances of pain and exclusion to Hilary, I was able to realize that I had the inner resources and self-knowledge that could enable me to respond empathetically toward my students. For me, the conversations with Hilary revealed silenced and hidden spaces that, when opened up through vulnerability, supported me toward taking an ethical stand that humanized both me and my students.

### **Empathy versus Sympathy**

It took months to get to the point where our differences revealed themselves. After all, this is what duoethnography begs from us. The third theme that emerged from our research was our different views on empathy and sympathy. This is when our dialogue came to a head and we reached an impasse. It was through empathy that I began to understand how our stories rooted

into flesh tones of black and white forced us to understand empathy and sympathy differently.

**Hilary:** As a humanist, I view empathy as needing to make sense of human behavior or taking the perspective of another person. I recognize the emotions of others as I strive to make people feel whole. Empathy, as cliché as it sounds, is walking a mile in another person's shoes. In order to enact this, I have to connect to a feeling within myself that understands that feeling. This is something I have valued and adhered to my entire life. It is one of the qualities I admire most in myself. It is the trait that I often turn to when I am teaching. It provides the platform for me to reflect on a person or a situation before I take action. That in-between space is essential when one attempts to connect with another.

Empathy is more than a feeling. It is the ability to remain nonjudgmental by recognizing emotions in others and communicating that feeling. In that communication, there is the action. When Dolana viewed empathy as pity, as a relation of power over the other, which in turn encourages one person to feel superior to the other, I was shocked. I always viewed sympathy as a kind of pity, but never empathy as pity. Dolana felt that my view of empathy was simply a feeling and not an action. When I empathize I am, in fact, embodying an empathetic understanding across differences and in doing so attempting to make connections between people of difference. However, it does start with a feeling. Dolana writes: "Social participation on the ground is required as part of the process. In other words, we can't just be satisfied with feeling. ... We need to stand up for what we believe and bring about change through positive social change work on the ground." That is what I believe

I act, not in the form of activism, but rather I enact my empathetic stance from a place of compassion and genuine care ... as a White woman. Is this what it means to empathize as a White woman? Is my empathetic stance too soft? Too naïve? Or have I just not critiqued my stance deeply enough to understand? I don't know, because I have not lived a life rooted in the Black experience, but I do know my Black colleague had a visceral reaction to my humanist interpretation of empathy, and now I am left trying to figure out what it is I need to reconceptualize.

When I enact my empathetic feelings, am I positioning myself above another? Do I feel superior? Perhaps I do. This may be my unconscious bias bubbling to the surface. This unsettles me, but since undergoing this duoethnographic process this is something I have been challenged to think about and consider. Dismissing it would simply reproduce my colonized narrative, one I was born into through my unearned privilege of being born White. My roots have been shaken.

I have been told I am a recovering racist who uses her power over another under the guise of empathy. An unattractive self-portrait has been unveiled. However, in order to do this work, I have to consider this possibility and dig deep to determine my motives. According to Norris and Sawyer (2012) "Duoethnography ... makes one's current position problematic. One's beliefs can be enslaving, negating the self, but the act of reconceptualization can be regenerative and liberating" (p. 18). There is a glimmer of hope.

Two years later, the process we underwent forced me to begin to decolonize my practice. The production of knowledge Dolana and I have generated through our

dialogues forces the visceral knowledge of oppressive ideologies of domination central to scholarly discourse to take a back seat in favor of a more egalitarian collaboration that produces knowledge that is inevitably open-ended and about possibilities of being more for people (Diversi & Moreira, 2009). This self-reflexive process is transformative in nature. Am I changing?

Duoethnographies portray knowledge in transition, and as such knowing is not fixed but fluid. Truth and validity are irrelevant. What exists is the rigor of the collaborative inquiry that is made explicit in the duoethnography itself. (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 20)

It is this very process that has brought me to this place of reconceptualization. Our performance of dialogue, poetry, critical response, and reflexivity has forced me to think differently and to question my motives when I am calling on empathy to make sense of a situation. I have moved from humanist, which is confined to an individual, to “unconditional humanization,” which expands the “conscious search for justice, egalitarian social rights, individual sense of dignity and integrity, cultural space for the exploration of identities that transcend oppressive representations, and ultimately, the search for conscientization” (Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 185), and moved it outwards towards a collective imagination beyond the self. I now ask myself: Why am I experiencing empathy for another? Is it originating from an egalitarian space rooted in dignity and integrity or a position of pity or shame? Why? I would never have considered this before. In the found poetry I wrote: “Through empathy I began to understand just how differently we view the world” and now as a result of this analysis I

am beginning to understand why and it is contributing to shifting my thinking—that is, the process informed my openness to participate in a collective critical learning forum that supported my own developing critical consciousness regarding race, racism, and the impact of colonialism. Once such forum was the White Privilege Symposium Canada (WPSC, 2016) where I had an opportunity to meet with critical educators, scholars, and activists who contributed to workshops and keynotes. This collective of critical social justice thinkers contributed to changing my pedagogy toward a critical teaching approach. Toward the end of this article, I provide more details regarding this critical transformation.

**Dolana:** Hilary urged me to tell my stories to my class. To Hilary, speaking about race should be an empowering act. But to me, speaking from an embodied understanding about race to a room of White, female, teacher education students held risks. I could easily be misunderstood. I kept remembering the student voices from my course evaluations, “This course focused too much on race,” “There is too much information on human rights,” “Too much on Black issues.” These kinds of student responses minimized my expertise as a feminist, critical sociologist, education scholar who specialized (over two decades) in studying and researching on critical issues of race, the curriculum as racialized texts, and the diversification of the teaching profession.

I pushed on, teaching from the perspective of teachers who were champions of equity. My classes featured Ted Talks and case studies that modeled teachers who were social change agents, many of whom I had researched with over the years. Over many years teaching undergraduate students, I faced a great deal of resistance to hearing

these stories. Hilary encouraged me to tell students about these forms of resistance (to restory these stories). The challenge was to tell my story from a place that would bring my students into the discussion, and help them hear rather than shut down. Earlier in our conversations I insisted that empathy (as a feeling) is not enough as we need to augment it with action. Here is my restory of my story in which I use empathy in concert with action in order to build relations with my students:

*People don't usually think that you need culturally relevant skill-sets to teach in mostly White university settings. But what has become apparent to me is that you do. Students need to trust you before they will be willing to listen to you. As a Black woman, I find I have to work very hard to gain the trust of my White students. In order to deliver a culturally relevant curriculum that offers up a bridge on which my students can begin to have conversations on race, I feature the stories of White teachers who are transformative educators. One such example is Erin Gruell. She is often viewed as a hero, whose decision to teach in an urban setting is seen as an act of bravery. But most people don't realize or recognize that it takes bravery as a Black woman to stand in front of a predominately White group of students and teach them. I've had students question me. When I first began teaching, I had students who were convinced that a PhD student, who was my teaching assistant (TA), was the professor and that I was the student. Albeit, this person was close to my age. She was tall and blonde and recognizable as a person in a position of stature (to*

*which the word "professor" could be ascribed). When presented with us both, students instantly gave her the recognition as the professor over me. People don't realize how that minimizes you as a person, that you are not automatically given the respect that you earned and that the respect is given to a White person rather than yourself. I have to have humility when I work with White students as it allows me to answer with compassion rather than indignation. I must pause and think through their realities of growing up and living in mostly White communities. I must take an ethical stance that has empathy and understanding at its heart. By thinking over the fact that, beyond the Black celebrities' students see in the media, they often don't have exposure to positive Black role models, I am able to build a sensitivity that doesn't judge my students. Perhaps the opposite is often what is up for consumption, in that popular culture can represent Black women in very limited ways as Jezebels, mammies, and slaves. There are few instances in Hollywood where positive Black women are represented in their totality, rather than as limited caricatures.*

I no longer wait to be humanized by my students. I answer back with the radical love my kindergarten teacher gave to me. I have come to know the value of both radical love and a culturally relevant approach that is responsive to White students. Together these sensibilities best assist me in forming bridges between my White students and myself. I am grateful that Hilary invited me to engage in conversations through

duoethnography. At the beginning, our shared meetings were a secret place where we could value who we are and what we bring to our work. They allowed us to interrogate silenced memories in ways that we could then restory in our transformed teaching practice. In sharing the process with our students and going public we make transparent the notion that ethical practice involves an awaking that we must keep alive throughout all the work we do as diversity and social justice teachers.

### In Summary

**Hilary:** At the conclusion of our dialogues, I initiated a two-year intensive self-examination of my White privilege. During this time, I read a new body of literature that opened my eyes to systemic privilege and how that operates in the world, in schools, and in the academy. Learning about White supremacy has motivated me to:

*Reconceptualize the teacher education course I co-ordinate, which shifted from a focus on methods and learning theories of teaching to becoming a culturally inclusive/responsive teacher educator. It now reflects the deeply held belief that I need to teach teacher candidates to examine their biases and assumptions about what it means to become a culturally responsive teacher as a recovering racist.*

*Ground my collaborative work with a group of committed White sessional instructors whom I encourage to examine their White privilege.*

*Seek out conference sessions that explore anti-oppressive education, diversity, intersectionality, White privilege,*

*and White supremacy. I voice my views in these sessions supporting the notion that White folks need to speak up about Whiteness and racism. It has become my personal responsibility.*

*Take part in the White Privilege Symposium Canada for academics and activists advocating for equity, justice, and action (Brock University, 2016). This conference illuminated just how much work I still need to do to grapple with my position of unearned power as a White female academic. It is a position I do not take lightly.*

When I reflect back on my career in education, I note that I have always held my Bachelor of Education degree in high esteem, at present I still hold it higher than my terminal PhD degree. I have always understood how my position of power, as a teacher, could either encourage a person to flourish or discourage a person, causing harm. My humanist roots taught me the gift of compassion and empathy and my unconditional humanization calls for me to rethink my unearned position of privilege and root it in a critical consciousness which demands that I shift my focus to:

*a much more critical analysis of whiteness in all its manifestations and make a firm commitment to end it in radical and profound ways. This means more than just acknowledging White privilege but actually doing something about it in terms that are concrete and proportional to the degree of its influence. (Hackman, 2015, p. 59)*

As Dolana taught me, empathy is not just a feeling, it is a doing.

**Dolana:** The White Privilege Symposium 2016 at Brock University was about creating community where we would be unafraid to talk about race and racism (Mogadime, Rowsell, Radersma, Moore Jr., & Clarke, 2016). Prior to that, our dialogical meetings in Hilary's office were one of the few places on campus where I could actually feel safe, welcome, and validated to speak about race from a critical position. In the quiet of the shared space, with Hilary listening, I felt I could purge years of feeling isolated, of being read and misread as a Black woman who was wasn't automatically given the validation to call herself professor without first insisting that that is indeed who she is. No doubt, I have been part of a Black community of Canadian scholars who have questioned exclusionary practices that silence the contributions of Black intelligentsia within educational institutions (Mogadime, 2015). At WPSC, our critical conversations on race had widened to embrace international scholars, academics, and activists who take on the critical positions challenging institutions to abolish systems of exclusion from intersectionality subject positions.

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