“White Teachers in Diverse Classrooms: Using Narrative to Address Teaching About Racial Dynamics”  
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**Abstract**  
Diversity training and multicultural competency workshops typically work from a top down logic in which educators or trainers skilled in working in multi-racial settings inform less enlightened colleagues about what they need to do to communicate across difference. This ‘expert to novice’ dynamic can easily create resentment as participants feel blamed for their lack of racial awareness. A missing component of this work is the use of narrative disclosure by expert instructors of how they struggle with their own learned racism as they seek to navigate racial complexities. This chapter outlines a pedagogy of narrative disclosure in which an instructor’s personal experience is placed front and center as a teaching tool. It emphasizes the importance of team teaching as a way of modeling respectful disagreement and an openness to multiple perspectives for students.

**Introduction**  
Programs designed to help people create and negotiate workforce diversity are typically framed around the construct of difference. Difference is seen as positive, as part of the infinite variety of the world. A workplace characterized by differences in culture, race, gender, age, religion, ability, and sexual orientation is held to be one with a competitive edge (Cox, 2001). This is because the kaleidoscope of diversity is assumed to create a kind of creative synergy, a spontaneous combustion of multiple perspectives and experiences. If we can create a workplace where differences are respected and valued, so the argument goes, this will be the catalyst for an unending exploration of new possibilities.

What this harmoniously appealing scenario often omits, however, is the presence of various ‘isms’; racism, sexism, ableism, ageism and so on. From a humanistic viewpoint, difference is a gift, a manifestation of the multitude of individual talents in the world. From the standpoint of critical theory (Brookfield, 2004) however, difference is often structured in ways that reflect wider inequities. So, in the case of racial and cultural difference, the broader material inequities that exist in the world are linked to racial and cultural identity. When Black, Brown and Red Americans are disproportionately poorer, less educated, and more frequently incarcerated than White Americans, critical theory inquires into the ways that structural barriers constantly marginalize those racial groups.

In this chapter I explore how instructors can use personal narratives – particularly when they work in teams – to teach about the ways that structural and systemic racism is internalized and then enacted. This kind of racism is not an individual choice, but a set of ideas and practices transmitted and learned from birth, and embedded in the way organizations and communities function day to day. I want particularly to look at the pedagogy of anti-racism involving White educators and trainers working with mostly White groups. How can White educators help other Whites, become aware of the ways
they unwittingly and unknowingly reinforce structural racism and enact racist ideology on a daily basis? I propose the use of personal narrative as a relatively unexplored approach.

**The Theoretical Background to Understanding Racism**

In this chapter racism is viewed not as an expression of individual prejudice or as a matter of personal choice, but as a learned ideology; that is, as an interlinked set of beliefs and practices that are embedded in social systems and structures. This understanding is grounded in the analytical framework of critical theory, so a brief explanation of this body of work is in order.

Critical theory is a term associated with thinkers from the Frankfurt School of critical social theory, such as Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), Marcuse (1964), and Habermas (1987). The theory describes the process by which people learn to accept as obvious and common sense the dominant ideologies (such as White supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy and representative democracy) that are embedded in everyday situations and practices. These ideologies shape behaviour and keep an unequal system intact by making it appear normal.

As a body of work, critical theory is grounded in three core assumptions regarding the way the world is organized: (1) that apparently open, Western democracies are actually highly unequal societies in which economic inequity, racism, and class discrimination are empirical realities; (2) that the way this state of affairs is reproduced as seeming to be normal, natural, and inevitable, thereby heading off potential challenges to the system, is through the dissemination of dominant ideology (in the case of the perpetuation of racism this ideology would be White supremacy), and (3) that critical theory attempts to understand this state of affairs as a prelude to changing it.

Dominant ideology comprises the set of broadly accepted beliefs and practices that frame how people make sense of their experiences and live their lives. When it works effectively it ensures that an economically unequal, racist, homophobic, and sexist society is able to reproduce itself with minimal opposition. Its chief function is to convince people that the world is organized the way it is for the best of all reasons and that society works in the best interests of all. So if Whites are overwhelmingly in possession of power and advantage, dominant ideology makes that fact seem unremarkable, not worth commenting on. Critical theory regards dominant ideology as inherently manipulative and duplicitous.

From the perspective of critical theory, a critical person is one who can identify this manipulation and discern how the ethic of capitalism, and the logic of bureaucratic rationality, push people into ways of living that perpetuate economic, racial, and gender oppression. Teaching critical thinking, therefore, involves teaching people to see behind the apparently normal façade of daily life to realize how ideological manipulation works to keep people quiet and in line. In terms of anti-racist work, this would entail helping people see how ideological manipulation ensures that the majority accept these ideologies unquestioningly. Those working within the critical theory paradigm are often regarded as troublemakers who see power, race, class, sexism, ableism, and homophobia everywhere, even when the majority is convinced these do not exist.
Critical theory defines racism as a system of beliefs and practices (i.e. an ideology) that legitimizes the power of one racial group and justifies it viewing all others as inherently inferior. Racism is simultaneously overt (in law, the economy, political participation and education) and covert (in the media, social mores, fashion). When structural and systemic racism is threatened it responds sometimes with overt force (torture, police brutality, political imprisonment, murder) and sometimes with covert manipulation (symbolic festivals, media, prominent ‘success’ stories). Structural racism is expert at reconfiguring itself by appearing to have ceded important territory while in reality maintaining its power.

Racist ideology – often referred to as White supremacy – is embedded in the institutions and conventions of everyday lives. This ideology places ‘Whiteness’ as the preferred norm, ‘White people’ as the ‘natural’ authorities that ought to be entrusted with decision-making power and White knowledge (and White forms of knowledge production) as the most valid produced by humankind. This ideology is often implicit and its perpetrators such as myself frequently denied that they are disseminating it, even when doing so.

As I mentioned earlier, racist ideology is often so embedded in the daily business of life that the White majority finds it impossible to see other than in dramatic events such as hate crimes, racial chants or beatings. As overt racism has become punishable by law, and as politically correct language gains wider acceptance, racist ideology moves underground. The knapsack of taken-for-granted privileges Whites enjoy is rarely acknowledged. There are no more signs declaring “Whites Only” and people are not told that they are not being hired because of the color of their skin. Although news media report dramatic instances of overt racism, endemic racism today is far more likely to be carried in everyday instances of racial micro-aggression.

Popularized by Wing Sue (2010) micro-aggressions are the small acts of exclusion and marginalization committed by a dominant group towards a minority. They are the kinds of seemingly natural, instinctive and unthinking behaviors that keep dominant ideology intact. Moreover, they never overt or explicit, nothing as obvious as using a racist epithet or telling a person of color to shut up. The two constituent defining elements of a micro-aggression underscore this subtlety. First, receivers of micro-aggressions are usually left wondering ‘did that really happen?’ and asking ‘should we be offended by that?’ or ‘did he/she mean to be insulting?’ Second, when enacters of micro-aggressions are confronted with their actions they typically, and in a sense quite honestly, deny that there was any aggressive intent. They explain, with full sincerity, that no exclusion or diminution was planned, and that the receiver is indeed imagining things. They will explain their action away by saying that they had a temporary moment of forgetfulness, or that they got their words mixed up.

The key point about micro-aggressions is that they are never consciously intended to diminish a person of color. Instead, they are so ingrained in the repertoire of daily behaviors Whites employ to manage interpersonal interactions – the tone of voice we use, the gestures we make, where we direct eye contact, the analogies that unconsciously suggest themselves to us, the jokes we use, the shorthand terms we employ – that we
never experience them as deliberately focused on insulting someone. In this sense they are truly ideological, so fully assimilated as to be unnoticeable until someone brings them to our attention. Helping people uncover and address these micro-aggressive expressions of dominant ideology is one of the tasks to be examined in this chapter.

Repressive Tolerance – a Key Critical Theory Idea in Analyzing Racism

An important idea drawn from critical theory that helps illuminate how racism persists is Marcuse’s (1965) concept of repressive tolerance. Marcuse was interested in how institutions managed to deflect any serious challenge to their power and presumed legitimacy by appearing to cede territory and embrace change while staying the same. Token gestures such as changing the language and images representing the institution would be one example. I know of many higher education institutions that have changed their brochures and publicity materials to make it look as though their student body is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial rainbow coalition, all the while retaining an overwhelmingly White student body. Similarly, the creation of a ‘Diversity’ unit on campus is often assumed to have addressed effectively the problem of racism, hate speech, bigotry and so on. The institution can point to the new office or unit as evidence of substantive change. Meanwhile institutional procedures and culture can remain exactly the same.

The contemporary discourse of diversity, of opening up the field of higher education to diverse voices, perspectives and traditions, can be analyzed quite effectively using the idea of repressive tolerance. An honorable and emancipatory position to take is that higher education research, theorizing and practice needs to include alongside the grand narrative of Eurocentric rationality work that draws on other cultural traditions and represents different racial perspectives. Providing an array of alternative perspectives and sensibilities seems to be a major step in moving away from a situation in which White, male, European voices dominate. Yet Marcuse alerts us to the possibility that this apparent broadening of voices can actually reinforce the ideology of White supremacy that it purports to undercut.

By widening curricula to include a variety of traditions we appear to be celebrating all positions. But the history of White supremacy, and the way that language and structures of feeling frame Whiteness as the natural, inevitable conceptual center, means that the newly included voices, sensibilities and traditions are always positioned as the exotic other. Higher educators can soothe their consciences by believing progress is being made towards racial inclusivity and cultural equity, and can feel they have played their small but important part in the struggle. But as long as these subjugated traditions are considered alongside the dominant ideology, repressive tolerance ensures they will always be subtly marginalized as exotic, quaint, other than the natural center. The logic of liberating or discriminating tolerance would require an immersion only in a racial or cultural tradition that diverged radically from mainstream ideology; for example, a higher education graduate program that allowed only the consideration of Africentric ideas and perspectives. The logic of repressive tolerance holds that as long as Africentrism is considered as one of many possible perspectives, including Eurocentrism, it will always be positioned as the marginal alternative to the White supremacist center.
Pedagogically, the logic of Marcuse’s argument is that we need to ensure students’ extended immersion in a radically different set of ideas and perspectives that challenge the dominant ideology. An example of this would be an instructor establishing a ground rule that when students of color express their being on the receiving end of racism, that White students do not try to talk them out of it by saying that it wasn’t systemic racism they were experiencing, just an act of individual foolishness, naiveté or forgetfulness. For example, the New Orleans based *People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond* does not allow any debate of whether or not widespread endemic racism exists in the USA. Participants in workshops sponsored by the institute are told to accept this as fact. This kind of strong declaration has its roots in Marcuse’s notion that sometimes educators just need to insist that learners ignore mainstream ideas and focus only on a radically different perspective.

**Moving from Analysis to Action: Organizing Education for Diversity**

For the rest of this chapter I want to move beyond a preliminary analysis of how systemic and structural racism is learned to focus on how personal narratives – particularly shared amongst a multiracial teaching team – can help people understand and challenge the persistence of structural and systemic racism. As a participant in diversity and anti-racist professional development workshops over the years I have often noticed a particular dynamic at play. Essentially the workshop is set up to help participants learn about cultural and racial difference and to help them be more alert to the ways they fall into reproducing racist behaviors by perpetuating cultural stereotypes and holding inaccurate assumptions about different racial groups. The underlying assumption is that through education and self-reflection people can learn to work in ways free of racist undertones. Anti-racist and diversity education is something done to you by those who have cracked the code of cultural misunderstandings and who have come out the other side of struggling with racism to a point where they can now teach others how to think and work in non-racist ways. In these workshops racism is framed as a personal choice, not a systemic phenomenon that soaks itself into your micro actions.

This paradigm has been challenged by the work of the *European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness* (ECCW) in San Francisco. The Collaborative has met monthly for the last 16 years to examine how Whites can educate each other, and themselves, about White supremacy. Its members note how the desire to be seen as ‘good White people’ “who act as effective allies to people of color by challenging the injustices of white hegemony and privilege” (ECCW, 2010 p. 146) permeates so much of anti-racist education. Paradoxically, as the ECCW notes, “this desire to be and be seen as a good white person often leads each of us to behaviors that have the opposite effect of what we intend” (page 147).

From examining their own personal experiences, the ECCW members note two very common mistakes committed when Whites try to teach each other about race and racism. The first is that of proselytizing, of “exhorting in an officious and tiresome way” to other Whites the need for anti-racism. The effect of this is that those on the receiving end
become defensive or shut down entirely. In the zeal to educate people about racism, proselytizers end up bringing anti-racist endeavors into disrepute. The second error noted by the ECCW is that of disdaining less racially ‘enlightened’ colleagues as objects of scorn to be pitied or condemned. Disdaining is rarely overt in my experience, but rather the sending of a subtle message that you are one of the many who ‘just don’t get it’ in contrast to the racially cognizant elite few who have cracked the code of how to be non-racist.

As soon as I read the ECCW’s analyses of these errors I recognized my own commission of these exact same behaviors. And I realized that what was missing from my own practice was a full disclosure of how the ideology of White supremacy was alive and well within me. Instead of educating people from a supposed position of racial cognizance what I really needed to do was to talk openly about my own struggle with my own racism. Slowly I came to understand that education about racism was often best done through narrative disclosure, rather than sharing tips and techniques of what did, or did not, work.

Pedagogically I now think of anti-racist education as being as much about teaching our own racism as it is about scrutinizing curricula, institutional policies, and organizational practices for evidence of structural disenfranchisement. If racism is understood as a learned ideology, something that pervades everyday speech, media images, peer group learning and family dynamics, then it is surely reasonable to expect that even adult educators committed to dismantling racism have internalized aspects of this ideology.

In this chapter I argue that even the most experienced White anti-racist educators are likely to have elements of the learned ideology of racism living within them. Instead of trying to purge themselves of these, conceal them, or damp them down, an alternative educational approach is to make these racist inclinations public and to engage learners in a consideration of how to recognize and challenge these. This approach uses educators’ own attempts to model a critical analysis of their own learned racism. It asks questions such as; (a) How have we learned racism from dominant ideology? (b) How do our racist impulses continue to manifest themselves in our actions? (c) What are ways we can identify these? (d) How are our racist leanings interrupted by disruptive experience? (e) How do we challenge and push back against them?

Learning Racism – a Personal Example

In this section I want to provide an illustration of how racism is learned using myself as an example. As with all Whites in Britain, I grew up in a world in which Whiteness, and all things White, was taken as the ‘natural’ order of things. I have had 6 decades of ideological conditioning into White Supremacy and, as a result I do not expect it ever to leave me. Attitudes and beliefs I picked up in my childhood, adolescence and young adulthood were that Blacks were alternatively lazy, happy, or violent, Pakistanis and Indians were sexually irresponsible having large families, and Gypsies were thieves out to mark your house as an easy target. White supremacy was not without complications,
though. For example, the White Irish were portrayed as lazy, drunken brawlers, with a markedly inferior IQ.

These stereotypes were earned through jokes with peers, family conversations, and media images. They flourished in the vacuum of no contact with anyone other than Whites like myself. I don’t think I had a conversation with a Black person until I was 18 years old. This ideology of White supremacy rarely named itself as such. Overt declarations of White racial superiority were rare and, even as racist attitudes were being learned, I was engaged in apparently anti-racist acts. For example, as an undergraduate I participated in demonstrations against the South African Rugby team that represented the then South African apartheid regime. But external behavior often masks learned instincts, and so it was with me.

External events sometimes challenged the power of this ideology. One pivotal event in adolescence helped disrupt the way White Supremacy moved in me. This happened at the age of 17 when I was being beaten up by a gang of White youths (they were ‘rockers’ I was a ‘mod’) in Banbury High Street one Friday night. A Black American GI serviceman from Upper Heyford Air Force base crossed the street and broke up the fight telling us “everybody’s got to be cool now”. That man saved me from potentially severe injury. In my memory I was on the verge of falling to the floor as the GI intervened. Being born in Bootle (Liverpool) I knew that once you were on the floor things got a lot worse because then people could kick you in the kidneys and head. That event formed what Critical Race Theory (CRT) calls a counter-story that disrupted the White Supremacist script forming in my head that said that Black people are violent and start fights and White people are peacemakers who sometimes have to use force to reign in Black instigators of violence. Here was a stunning role reversal that made a big impression on me.

But despite disruptive moments and events such as these White Supremacy moves in me as it does in most Whites. First, my skin color means that for my whole career I am used to seeing as gatekeepers in adult education people who look like me. Now I suppose I am one of those gatekeepers, continuing the unproblematized White Supremacy norm. I never have to question my right to publish something and White epistemology is something bred into my neural synapses. Racism – the ugly operationalization of the ideology of White supremacy – moves in me in ways that constantly catch me by surprise. I see a Black pilot enter the cockpit of the plane on which I’m traveling and catch myself thinking “will this flight be safe?” Interestingly, Nelson Mandela writes about having the same reaction in his autobiography (Mandela, 1994).

In classes I catch myself holding back from challenging students of color and realize my so called ‘empathy’ or desire to be an ally masks an embedded racist consciousness which says that ‘they’ can’t take a ‘strong’ challenge from a White person. The ECCW notes how Whites often withhold their contributions in multi-racial dialogues so as not to be seen as enacting White supremacy. They point out that this implies that the White voice is so powerful it will eclipse all others, and that by withholding colleagues of color are left wondering what Whites are thinking.
Clearly, racism moves in me in small, micro-aggressive ways. I find myself quickly granting paper extensions to Black students and can only assume it springs from a White Supremacist judgment that because Black students are not as intelligent as White students, of course they will need more time to complete their work. I keep silent in a presentation given by a scholar of color because (so my internal calculus goes) my voice is so powerful it will diminish the voice of the presenter. It is deeply sobering to realize how strong and enduring is the successful ideological conditioning of White Supremacy.

**Outlining the Pedagogy of Narrative Disclosure**

For the rest of this chapter I will explore in some detail the ways in which personal narrative disclosure, properly timed, can be an effective instructional tool. I grew up suspicious of the use of narrative, of storytelling, as I would have described it. Storytelling was something that was entertaining but essentially fictional. It was most certainly not academic, chiefly because it was clearly subjective and a-theoretical. It has taken me a long time to realize that narrative is one of the most compelling pedagogic approaches I can use. Nothing draws people more quickly into considering information and perspectives that are challenging than a personal story, and dissertations that are scholarly personal narratives (Nash, 2004; Nash and Bradley, 2011; Nash and Viray, 2013) are often far more likely to influence practice than third person research reports.

The appeal of narrative is powerful yet simple. Narrative draws the reader or listener in. The disclosure of personal experience, particularly when told in the form of a story, has far greater effect than the presentation of research data. People remember examples, metaphors and analogies they hear in a personal story far more than they do a theoretical explanation or a study’s empirical findings. So whenever I have a pedagogic aim of teaching about the pervasive nature of racism I always work from the position that before I can ask anyone else to explore how it lives within them I need to engage in a prolonged period of self-disclosure of how it lives within me. I usually begin by defining some constituent elements of the ideology of White supremacy and then proceed to show how each of them flourishes within me. Let me describe three of these.

**Whites are Natural Gatekeepers**

This first idea seeps its way insidiously into our consciousness. It does not assert itself as an overt injunction, as in ‘you must be White to be editor of this journal, winner of this award, compiler of this handbook’. It’s more that the power of the White gatekeeper role is revealed when we come across a gatekeeper who is not White. The instinctive surprise we experience at such moment is the chief indicator of the power of this ideology.

When uncovering this ideology I will usually start by talking about those who, in a four-decade career, have been my boss. There has not been one person of color who has been in a position of direct authority over me. Every dean, department head, principal, president and book editor I have worked with has been White like myself. So I have no model of a person of color who has exercised gatekeeper power or influence over me.
I then talk about my own gatekeeper role. An Endowed Chair is the top of the professorial hierarchy and I now find myself in the role of mentor to junior faculty at the outset of their careers who are trying to get published. Several of these are colleagues of color. So now I’m in the position of the White power broker trying to work as an ally whilst working in an overwhelmingly White field and still being in thrall to learned racist ideology. I talk about how I try to deal with this contradiction. I say that I try not to set any agenda with my mentee but that I always begin any mentoring conversations asking mentees what their agendas and goals are, and how they feel I could be of help. I never agree to a mentoring role unless asked to do so by the mentee, even though superiors have sometimes wanted to foist me on colleagues they see as underperforming.

At the outset I try to acknowledge my own identity as a White, Euro-American, and how the rules of the game have been set up to help me. If a junior colleague wishes to play this game of publish or perish I am more then willing to help them do that. I don’t try to pretend that I can in any way draw on my own struggles to get to my position as a way of understanding theirs. I don’t insist they call me ‘Stephen’, which is what I’m most comfortable with and would much prefer. The ‘Dr. Brookfield’ or ‘Professor Brookfield’ that I am usually called, is always a reminder of the power differential between us.

Colleagues of Color Need Special Help and Assistance – They Can’t Make it Without a ‘White’ Ally

One of the dynamics that the ECCW talks about is the need for ‘good’ Whites to be seen as an ally. I have to admit, whenever I hear White colleagues declare themselves allies I cringe. This is because the designation of ally is not ever ours to make. Yes, I would like to be considered an ally but I understand that the naming of me in that way is not in my hands. But when working with White students or colleagues I try to keep the cringe internal. Displaying it openly is a clear act of disdaining in the way the ECCW identifies this. Instead I often begin any discussion of being an ally by declaring my core assumptions of this work; that any person of color will never trust me and that this should have no bearing on my readiness to work in ways that seem anti-racist. I also own up to my belief that I should never expect to be acknowledged or thanked for this kind of work.

One of the things I try to talk a lot about is my own practice of interacting with colleagues and students of color. I talk about my own withholding behaviors, of not speaking for fear of seeming authoritarian or racist. I remember the first time I worked with a group in which African American students were present. Whenever one woman spoke I would remain studiously silent, congratulating myself on my empathic support. One day this student pulled me aside and asked me why I never responded to her comments in classroom discussion. She was visibly upset with what she saw as my disinterest in her views. So the supposed act of an ‘ally’ actually increased her perception of the power I held over her.

I also describe my experiences working in multi-racial teaching teams. I am known as something of a soft touch for any tale of woe, but particular for tales told by students of color. So for years I would unhesitatingly grant extensions, and push back deadlines, for any such student who asked for those. My own rationale was that White institutions
needed to bend over backward to make allowances for those students who have not had
the privilege of a rigorous academic training. Although I always tried to grade in what I
then called a ‘color-blind’ way, I would feel much more pressure to round up a score for
a student of color compared to a White student.

But when working in multi-racial teams it quickly became apparent to me that my
teammates of color behaved very differently. They would be much less ready to grant
extensions and would frequently ask me why I had graded a student of color so
generously. I began to realize that the behaviors that I had imagined were in some way
contributing to anti-racist pedagogy could actually indicate a deeply ingrained racism. In
essence I was assuming without stopping to question this that students of color were not
capable of handling the same full-blown critique I would make of White students’ work.
Furthermore, I was assuming that students of color could not reach the same standards of
excellence as White students, and so I should ‘go easy’ on them and bump up their mark
whenever I was in doubt about the merits of a piece of work. In essence I was giving
marks for showing up and for the sheer fact of handing something in, irrespective of the
quality of the work, in a way I would never do for White students.

“You’re Being Way Too Sensitive”; Uncovering Racial Micro-Aggressions
I see racial and gender micro-aggressions everywhere and always try to use my own
commission of these as the starting point for examining this concept. So I will typically
begin a class or workshop examining these by sharing my most recent micro-aggressions.
Let me give two examples here. One is in an academic class on leadership where I asked
all the students in a discussion to give their preliminary ‘take’ on an issue the course was
examining. After hearing from each student I summarized what I felt were the main
themes and differences revealed in the discussion. Upon finishing my summary a student
raised her hand and said I’d missed out one member of the group, a young Asian
American woman. I was momentarily flustered, apologized, and invited the overlooked
student to speak.

During the coffee break I thought the incident over and realized it was a classic example
of a micro-aggression. I certainly had no plans to exclude this student. I had not come to
class thinking ‘I must make certain student A doesn’t have the chance to speak”. And,
had I been confronted with my behavior in the moment I would have denied any
exclusionary intent. So when I returned to class after coffee I began the session by
apologizing again and saying that what the students had just witnessed was a classic
example of a racial micro-aggression. A representative of the dominant culture had
unknowingly and unwittingly marginalized someone from a community of color.

One of the White students told me not to be so hard on myself and said I was reading far
too much into a momentary lapse of forgetfulness. I explained that micro-aggressions are
never intended. Instead, they are ingrained, seemingly instinctive behaviors that
represent years of unconscious assimilation and socialization. They are ideological in the
sense that they become part of our daily repertoire, behavioral minutiae that actually
represent a socially ordered system of structural inequality. At this point the student I
had overlooked spoke up and said that the same thing had happened to her in every class
she had taken at the university. Her experience had been that of being repeatedly ignored.

The second example occurred in a professional development workshop I was running. The participants were all leaders within their own organization and we had convened for a day to examine, amongst other things, ways in which the organization could provide services that were more inclusive. At one point in the day we were talking about the influence of machismo in sport and how this connected to homophobic attitudes and I volunteered the comment that there was only one openly Gay athlete in U.S. professional sports, Robbie Rogers of the LA Galaxy soccer team.

A woman at the training immediately spoke up saying, “you mean the first gay male athlete” and pointed out the presence of openly gay female basketball players, including the lucrative Nike sponsorship deal just signed by Brittney Griner, the top pick in the 2013 basketball draft. We then mentioned top tennis players of the past such as Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova. This was a wonderful example of a micro-aggression, this time one reflecting gender and patriarchy. Here was I, the paid outside ‘expert’ leading a workshop on inclusivity, supposedly aware of a whole range of race, class and gender inequities, and I had never thought about women as I was discussing professional sports. In effect I had dismissed a whole half of the human race without ever thinking about it!

**Writing as a Tool of Narrative Pedagogy - The Use of Scholarly Personal Narratives**

In the last decade or so the written narrative has been advocated and enacted by Robert Nash (2004) and a series of collaborators (Nash and Bradley, 2011; Nash and Viray, 2013, 2014) as an effective tool of education for diversity. A brief narrative of a racist incident that is put down on paper has a powerful permanence that can evoke hidden feelings far more than a conversation about the same incident. Nash and his collaborators call such writing an example of a scholarly personal narrative (SPN).

This kind of writing is a sustained exploration of one’s own narrative experience of a particular question, problem or dynamic that has broader social significance. It is not telling a story of an interesting episode in your life. Whatever aspects of your narrative included in an SPN must illuminate the central question that is being explored. In a dissertation I supervised Sandra Unger (2014) wrote a narrative of her move from the white suburbs to the east side of St. Paul to found a program for Black teens called the Lift. She moved into the community and tried to build relationships with working class African Americans. That was the ‘data’ she drew on to write her narrative. The central problem she explored was how people of different racial identities learn to build reciprocal relationships across racial and class boundaries.

As stated, an SPN is not just a personal narrative of one’s own experience, one’s life history or story. The ‘S’ in the SPN means that this narrative moves beyond simply recounting personal experience. It insists that three ‘scholarly’ components be threaded throughout the study. Narratives of personal experiences in the study are included only if
they illuminate the problem or question that has been identified. So you don’t just tell your story of whatever you find interesting in your life. Writers only include events and experiences that speak directly to the central topic. This is why clarifying the question being explored is so crucial in the early stages, since that question drives what is included from narrative experience and what theory is consulted.

The question that explored in an SPN must be one that has wider social implications. It should refer to some important dynamic in education, leadership, or the world at large that people are trying to figure out. Nash likes to say it should focus on change or transformation of some kind. References to relevant theory that sheds light on the narrative are woven throughout the study. There is not a separate section called ‘Theory’, ‘Research’ or ‘Literature Review’. Instead, the study moves back and forth between explication of the narrative and then theoretical commentary on it. This means that someone writing an SPN needs to know the different theoretical areas that might pertain to her topic very well.

It’s important to emphasize that the theory that is woven throughout the narrative should not always support the narrative as it is framed. The literature should also challenge the narrative thread, give markedly different perspectives on what happened, give multiple and contrasting readings of experience, and be critical of times when the narrative is becoming too neatly contrived. In this regard the supervisor of the SPN plays a crucial role in identifying ‘inconvenient’ theory or research that challenges a writer’s presentation of their narrative, and insisting that they respond to it.

This constant integration of theory means that the writer’s narrative is always deepening and changing. As the writer considers different research and theory that illuminates and questions the way the narrative is being told, he or she continually builds that new awareness of complexity into how the narrative unfolds. Symbiotically, as new aspects of the experiences recounted are revealed, so the writer often branches into theoretical areas not identified in the initial proposal.

Up to this point this chapter has focused on the speaking and writing of personal narratives by individual instructors. Now I wish to switch my focus a little to examine how personal narratives can have even greater pedagogic effect when they used by the members of a teaching team.

The Use of Personal Narrative within Team Teaching

I have a recurring dream that goes like this. One day the President of the United States calls me. “Stephen” she says, “the country has just discovered a new energy source that ensures the national debt is wiped out and we are awash in resources. I’d like you to be the new Tsar of higher education. You can make any change you want with no budgetary restrictions. What’s the first change you want to make?” I have no hesitation in replying “Madam President, I’d like to propose that – unless there’s a good reason for this not being the case – every college course from now on be team taught”. “Done” replies the President.
As you might guess, team teaching, properly done, is something I am passionate about. The ‘properly done’ caveat is crucial however. Team teaching is not two or three people agreeing to carve up a course into sections so that each person does thirty or fifty per cent of the sessions. Properly conducted, team teaching involves all members of the team planning the course, writing the syllabus, specifying learning objectives, conducting the class, and evaluating student work. This takes far more time than teaching solo. You need to coordinate, discuss and decide multiple matters as a group, something that adds considerably to your faculty load (Pharo, Davison, Warr, Nursey-Bray, Beswick, Wapstra and Jones, 2012).

Obviously within that structure leadership roles vary so that different members of the team have responsibility for teaching certain content, drafting particular assessment rubrics or running specific exercises. But every team member is in class all the time so that she or he can complement and support whatever the lead teacher is doing. This model of teaching parallels the work reality most students will face. In the information age, working in project teams is the norm, so it makes perfect sense for our pedagogy to mirror that reality.

I am such a proponent of this method because of my own experiences working in teams at multiple institutions over the past four decades. Where confronting racial dynamics in the classroom is concerned, a multiracial teaching team is best placed to illustrate how the micro-dynamics of racism play themselves out. I have also made it a point to observe teaching teams in action outside of my own discipline. As chroniclers of team teaching (Eisen and Tisdell, 2000; Ramsey, 2008; Plank, 2011) often point out, this approach has benefits for both students and teachers.

One of the problems trying to work in anti-racist ways is the lack of examples of what an honest conversation across racial differences looks like. Exhortations to conduct dialog across difference are frequent, but actual instances of this are rare. In my own work I rarely get the chance to talk publicly with colleagues from different racial and cultural backgrounds about how our racial identities enter into our exchanges and work practices. However, for several years I was an adjunct faculty member in the adult education doctoral program at National Louis University (NLU) in Chicago, where I regularly team-taught courses with Scipio A.J. Colin Jr. III, the Africentric theorist, and the late Elizabeth Peterson, both African American faculty members.

In our team teaching we would often talk about how our own racial identities framed the ways we negotiated decisions, employed different teaching approaches, and influenced how we responded to students’ requests. Dr. C (as Scipio was called) would use a call and response model of communication, regularly asking the group “are you with me now?” and “are you running with me?” Elizabeth would work from a critical race theory perspective, providing the White students with illustrations of how that differed from an Africentric perspective. This was a striking counterbalance to the idea that there was a unified Black or African American perspective on adult education.
Elizabeth and I then delivered a paper at an Adult Education Research Conference (AERC) titled “Race and Racism: A Critical Dialogue” (Peterson and Brookfield, 2007). Our idea was to model a candid exchange about race in which we wove into our conversation some very specific examples of how race played itself out in our own interpersonal relations. We chose as one example an incident involving the Harvard Educational Review (HER). In 2002 I was a Visiting Professor at Harvard University and was asked to contribute an article to the HER. I suggested to the editorial board that I invite Dr. C, Elizabeth Peterson, Ian Baptiste, Juanita Johnson-Bailey and Vanessa Sheared to contribute articles along with me on the theme of racializing the discourse of adult education, and that the journal issue take the form of a symposium on that topic.

The HER editorial board agreed to this suggestion and we all began to write our separate pieces. A few months later the editorial board changed its membership. The new board told us that now the symposium would take the form of a main article written by me, with commentaries on my piece submitted by my colleagues. So now we were faced with Stephen Brookfield’s piece being the central academic sun around which the contributions from the scholars of color would revolve. Not surprisingly my colleagues all dropped out from the project. As Elizabeth said in the dialog we had “I can remember feeling like I’d been slapped in the face when it was suggested that your article would be featured and we, as African American scholars, would be invited to respond to it” (Peterson and Brookfield, 2007, p. 5). I went ahead and published my own article reasoning that at a minimum it would be good to have a piece on racializing the discourse of adult education in the HER. I still don’t know if that was the right thing to do.

**Team Teaching Reaches a Wider Variety of Learners**

Solo teachers teach out of their preferred learning style and their individual experience. Although we can all expand our repertoire of teaching practices, there is a limit to how much we can change who we are. Moreover, no matter how many books on White racism we read, or how many conversations we have with people of color, we can never claim to be inside that experience. My own positionality as an English male, and more specifically my own racial membership as White, is an important element to acknowledge in this chapter. In their analysis of Black intellectual life Cornel West and bell hooks discuss the ways in which, according to hooks, “White theorists draw upon our work and our ideas, and get forms of recognition that are denied Black thinkers” (hooks and West, 1991, p. 36). She speaks of how “there is a feeling now that a White academic might take your idea, write about it, and you’ll never be cited” (ibid.).

In the same conversation West observes “White scholars are bringing certain baggage with them when they look at Black culture, no matter how subtle and sophisticated the formulations” (ibid.). I have learned that the baggage of my racial membership and identity means I cannot be an Africentric theorist whose being, identity and practice spring from African values, sensibilities and traditions. I can appreciate the accuracy and explanatory power of something like Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness. In so doing I can reflect on how being both African and American means that one is “always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the
world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois, 1969, p. 45). But though this may illuminate what some of my learners and colleagues are experiencing I can have no real understanding of what this means.

As a White Englishman I have no experiential, visceral access to the philosophy born of struggle that comprises the central dimension of African American thought. My skin pigmentation, White privilege and collusion in racism places me irrevocably and irretrievably outside the Africentric paradigm. I can learn from, and honor, this scholarship. I can be grateful for the way it questions and reformulates aspects of critical theory, or the way it shatters (in a helpful way) my own understandings and practices. But I can never claim to work as an Africentric adult educator. No matter how much I wish to honor this tradition, my racial membership precludes me making such a claim. In the words of a provocative volume, it is problematic to be Teaching What You’re Not (Mayberry, 1996).

But what I can do with some credibility is talk about how I have learned the ideology of White supremacy very efficiently. After all, I have been immersed in it for over six decades, had it rammed down my throat at times, and experienced how it is subtly communicated at others. I can’t turn myself into a person of color and I can’t use whatever slights I’ve suffered as an analog of racism. Neither can I become a methodological exemplar of different culturally grounded ways of teaching. I like words so I tend to teach with words. I like order so I tend to teach with lists and itemized classroom agendas. I’m not a visual teacher ready to incorporate body movement into my teaching and I’m not a Whizz at social media. I can try to broaden my skills to incorporate elements of these things but I’m always working from within the framework of who I am as a person.

But add another one or two teachers to the classroom and the experiential background of instruction broadens, as does the range of personalities involved. As an introvert I work well with extraverted colleagues. I can call for pauses and silence in class in a way that extraverts don’t. My extraverted colleague can give necessary presentations with greater punch and energy than I’m capable of. As a White I can talk with some authority about how Whites learn racist attitudes, how we don’t notice our racial micro-aggressions, and how we think of diversity and racism as something that ‘they’ – people of color – are affected by, not us.

When a person of color teaches this material with me, or when we lead a discussion or workshop together, the whole dynamic changes. If we know something of each other’s history and experience, and if each member of the team knows each other’s methodological preferences, habits and styles, we can keep in mind the need to provide a breadth of instructional approaches. I like to teach through narrative disclosure but have often taught with someone who is a strong theorist. He kept me from overdoing a self-indulgent use of autobiography, and I was able to punctuate his wholly theoretical explanations with narrative examples. Because we knew each of us had these tendencies this alternation worked. We were able to let students know that we brought different things to the pedagogic table.
Team Teaching Models Respectful Disagreement

One of the meta-agendas of higher education is teaching students how to disagree in ways that don’t shut down further communication. Models of student development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton and Renn, 2010; Jones and Abes, 2013) stress the movement students make from dualistic, right/wrong thinking, through multiplicitic relativity, to arrive at a stage of informed commitment. This movement involves learning to live with contradiction and disagreement, something Basseches (2005) explores in his work on the development of dialectical thinking in young adults. He reports how difficult it is for students to hold two contradictory ideas in tension without needing to decide that one is definitively correct and one clearly wrong.

A teaching team can model how to explore a dialectical tension by providing a variety of narratives on a common racial dynamic, stating the different understandings embedded in these narratives, and then demonstrating how each member strives to comprehend the other’s viewpoint. Members can summarize each other’s arguments, check that they’ve understood these correctly, and ask questions designed to elicit why these views are held. They can then critique these positions and end by summarizing how the discussion has confirmed and challenged their perspective.

As I have already emphasized this dynamic is crucial when it comes to teaching about racism. We can’t expect students to explore raw and contentious issues unless we have shown them we’re doing this too. But an added benefit of team teaching is that it allows you to demonstrate and enforce conversational protocols that stand a chance of keeping discussion going. For example, one of the most fundamental ways to demonstrate respect is to communicate to someone that you are actually listening to their narrative. The behavior that lies at the root of such respect is asking good questions; questions that are grounded in someone’s earlier comments in the narrative, that seek to understand a key turning point in the narrative, and that express a genuine curiosity regarding how the narrative will unfold.

One of the quickest ways to shut down racial discussion is to move to declarative statements. These are statements that assert one’s position, that try to convert people to agreeing with your views, and that, in the face of contrary evidence, are maintained with even greater ferocity. So a useful exercise is to require people only to ask questions that seek to understand another’s view by only asking for more information. Typical questions are; ‘What leads you to believe that?’ What’s the strongest piece of evidence you have for that view? Can you tell me more about how you came to that position? How would you respond to ‘A’s counter argument? These questions are particularly suited to narrative analysis.

Good narrative questions also grow out statements and descriptions already conveyed in the narrative. When a questioner circles back to something someone has said and asks them to develop a sub-point, or when someone asks how two of the events you’ve described in the narrative connect to each other, it’s clear to the storyteller that their
arguments are heard. A teaching team can model asking these kinds of questions about each other’s narratives in front of students.

A useful way to illustrate the complexity of racially based narratives is to post two or three stations around the room, each of which represents a distinctive position, theory or analytical framework that can be taken when analyzing a narrative. After one of the team has disclosed a particular narrative of an experience of racism the other team members can stand at these geographically separate stations and analyze that narrative – explaining its meaning and identifying its salient points - only in the voice of someone who holds the view represented by that station. So, for example, one instructor can stand under a sign saying ‘Critical Race Theory’, one under ‘Post Racial Society’ and one under ‘Color Blind’. They then hold a conversation about the narrative as if each of them was bringing only the viewpoint represented by their sign to their discussion of its significance.

Bringing different perspectives to bear on the same piece of content (in this case to the same narrative) is probably the most frequently cited reason for team teaching (Eisen and Tisdell, 2000; Plank, 2011). When a solo teacher tries to convey the different viewpoints or theoretical frameworks that exist he or she is always working within the confines of being a singular voice. Nothing beats team teaching for conveying complexity properly. Team teaching allows your partner to pose a question or contribute an insight that opens you up to a genuinely new way of thinking about something. After all, it’s not just students who are learning about the subject in a team taught classroom.

**Team Teaching Creates a Learning Environment of Risk and Uncertainty**

Discussing how racist ideas and behaviors are learned, and how they remain embedded in everyday actions and wider social structures, is often unsettling to students. But since college is a “dynamic, complex and often unsettling place” (Plank, 2011, p. 3) this dissonance can be productive. In team teaching there is no one clear source of authority and knowledge in the classroom. This can create an environment of discovery and inquiry. For example, Ouellett and Fraser (2011) in their analysis of interracial team teaching describe how one of them would have an unplanned idea in the middle of the class and ask the other in front of the students if she or he would be willing to try something new, on the spot. As they report “we were committed to modeling the intellectual and social learning and risk taking we were asking of students” (p. 76).

Risk-taking involves uncertainty and pause. When a colleague asks me a question about my narrative description in front of the students and I don’t have a good answer on the tip of my tongue, I say that I need a moment’s pause to think about this before replying. I always try to take plenty of time to think about my response as a way of socializing students to be more comfortable with periods of silence in class. Sometimes I will then say “you know I don’t have a good response for that question, I need to think more about it – can we come back to it later?” Alternatively, I will state my answer hesitatingly, maybe saying something like “I’m not really sure how to answer that, but as a first pass what I’m thinking might be the case is A.” Students need models of pause and hesitation just as much as they need confident declarations of your disciplinary authority. Team
teaching allows students to see how we stumble, pause, and double back as we try on new perspectives or understandings. And understanding racism involves many unexpected turns, dead ends and short cuts.

Sometimes team teachers can disclose how learned racism has framed their interactions. When I teach with colleagues of color I like to discuss in front of the class my actions, and asking colleagues and students to critique my actions, entails a level of extreme discomfort on my part. I still have a hard time hearing my actions described as racist, even though cognitively I am in full agreement with that judgment. Laying bare one’s own racism as a narrative teaching tool carries the risk of people shutting their ears to any future comments you might make. There is the risk of one’s racist behaviors being reported to superiors. Also, you never know how your colleagues will negotiate a conversation in which your, and their, racially based perceptions and judgments are publicly dissected.

When it comes to exploring racial dynamics people are so afraid of saying the wrong thing and being thought of as racist that conversation is inevitably stilted, full of pauses and hesitations. These should not be thought of as instances where the discussion goes awry, but as the natural rhythm when dealing with something as contentious as race. You need to slow the pace down and take plenty of time to think before you speak. The model of effective discussions that seems to hold sway in higher education is one of seamless and animated conversation, with people speaking over the top of each other as they jump in to make their point. Conversations about race will sometimes be like this. But just as easily they can be disjointed and full of silences. A team talking about race can show they are comfortable with silence and that sometimes they need time to sit with a comment or question before responding to it.

When a team tries to conduct a public conversation regarding their own racial dynamics, and the way that racial factors and racist attitudes influence the ways they make decisions, there is a strong element of unpredictability. Not only are you uncertain how colleagues are going to respond as the discussion deepens, but it is impossible to predict how students will react. Classrooms will often close down as students are unsure how to respond or contribute and as the level of uncertainty rises. I have had White students tell me that they daren’t speak because everything they say will be seen as racist, and students of color ask me to stop talking about race due to the deepened racism those conversations produce.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that racism is learned through family, media, school and friendships as the ideology of White supremacy seeps into our consciousness. Even Whites like myself who like to think of themselves as anti-racist frequently commit micro-aggressions that remain unacknowledged until a colleague brings them to our attention. Disruptive classroom events can heighten our awareness of these and they can be challenged through narrative disclosure, particularly in team teaching.
Illuminating how racism works on a systemic level is enormously complex and involves drawing upon highly theoretical literature such as critical theory, post-structuralism and post-colonialism. Personal narrative disclosure is an effective teaching approach to break through this theoretical fog and illustrate the relevance of particular concepts. Repressive tolerance, micro-aggressions, the way White supremacy is manifested – all these ‘big ideas can be encapsulated in a description of a singular critical incident. So in all kinds of training, teaching and professional development situations the use of spoken, or written (such as SPN’s) narratives can bring an intimidating topic to life. When leaders and instructors tell stories about their own experiences of enacting or confronting racism this brings complex concepts down to earth. It also sets a tone for similar disclosure by participants and learners.

Add the dimension of team teaching to this method and you have an effective way to bring a group much more quickly to a point where they are ready to examine racism. An instructional team can use their own narratives of identity formation and racial experiences to illustrate central concepts of racism, identity and White supremacy. And they can model a discussion of how they negotiate different racially and culturally formed viewpoints on racial dynamics.

**Key Terms & Definitions**

**Racism**
The systemic exclusion and diminishment of a group of people solely by phenotype. Although expressed in individual action, racism is embedded in institutional policy and functioning.

**Scholarly Personal Narrative**
A mode of writing that explores personal experience, and research informing that experience, to examine a social change dynamic.

**Team-teaching**
Teaching in which two or more instructors collaboratively design curricula, develop teaching plans, conduct class sessions and evaluate students’ work. Although individual teachers may take the lead in class their colleagues are always present.

**Critical Theory**
A body of ideas developed by the Frankfurt School that illustrates how an iniquitous social system is rendered normal through the dissemination of dominant ideology.

**Repressive Tolerance**
The mechanism by which a system appears to change in response to challenges from below whilst concealing the fact that the status quo remains intact.

**White Supremacy**
The ideology that Whites, due to their superior powers of reasoning, evolved morality and innate intelligence, deserve to be the ‘natural’ leaders and power holders in a system.

**Micro-aggressions**
Small, subtle daily acts of exclusion that often leave receivers asking ‘did that really happen?’ or ‘am I imagining that?’ When identified as aggressions these acts are strongly denied by the perpetrator who insists there is no malicious intent and the receiver is being overly sensitive.

**Additional Readings**


**References**


