Raising Awareness to Transcend Disciplines: Developing Teachers' Critical Awareness Across Disciplines to Increase Indigenous Learner Engagement

Tasha Riley

Griffith Institute for Higher Research, Griffith University, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

The issue of low graduation rates among Indigenous learners transcends borders. Some argue that racism and discrimination in schools and in wider society impede the success of Indigenous learners. Although teachers may not intend to make discriminatory decisions based on a learner's ascribed characteristics, research has demonstrated that teachers are capable of making biased decisions that deny opportunities to Indigenous learners. After reflecting upon current debates regarding effective educational strategies for diversity and Indigenous learners, the author contends that courses directed towards best practices for Indigenous learners in the classroom may be less beneficial than developing teachers' overall critical consciousness-raising and self-awareness abilities. The author presents what the literature reveals regarding various educational methods, practices, and epistemologies that have been successfully shared across disciplines in order to create more effective teachers and more responsive learners.

Ten years ago, I was a volunteer in the Kalahari region of Botswana. I was alarmed by discrimination towards the Indigenous learners there. My lack of self-awareness stemming from my privileged existence as a white, middle-class woman in Canada had enabled me to overlook the devaluing of Indigenous peoples within my country daily. A conversation with a local Indigenous student confronted me with my taken-for-granted privilege. The student explained that his 'skin gave him an advantage' since he had the physical attributes that enabled him to 'pass' as Batswana. He hid the complementary textbooks Indigenous people receive in fear that his peers would 'catch him out' and ridicule him. He had heard Canada was multicultural and asked if discrimination occurred in schools. I thought of my white skin, middle-class status, able-bodiedness, and relative heterosexuality. For me, school had been a safe haven. I had assumed others felt the same. Confronted by the question, I recalled my best friend being moved to a remedial classroom. Our grades were the same, yet our skin colour differed. I thought of her cousin who was annoyed by having to explain every hotdog day why he couldn't eat pork. I recalled the walk of defiance a friend had perfected to shield himself from the names like 'faggot' and 'queer boy' he encountered daily.

There was the young woman who fought school administrators for her right to wear a tuxedo to the prom. Even my elementary school mascot was an 'Indian Chief', complete with war paint and feathers, yet not a reference was made towards the colonisation of Canada's Indigenous peoples. I realised that while I found solace within the sheltered walls of my classroom, others found school a harrowing experience. I never noticed because my subject-position never required reflection.

In *Teaching to Transgress,* hooks (1994) points out that 'from grade school on, we are all encouraged to cross the threshold of the classroom believing we are entering a democratic space — a free zone where the desire to study and learn makes us all equal' (p. 177). My educational experiences were no exception and my ambivalence towards my subject-position made me blind to surrounding injustices. The conversation presented above alerted me to how the privileges bestowed through white skin, English-speaking tongue and middle-class background shaped my experiences overseas as well as those in the

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Tasha Riley, Griffith Institute for Higher Research, Griffith University, Brisbane QLD 4122, Australia. Email: t.riley@griffith.edu.au.

classroom. I began to distinguish the ways race, class, gender, ability, and sexuality intersect as I re-examined my classroom experiences. I recognised that while my friend's racial identity might have dictated her classroom placement, her mother's position as a psychologist influenced her final placement in an advanced class. While the skin colour of my Indigenous friend may have allowed him to 'pass', his sister of the same colour was not allowed to continue past grade school. Schools were not the neutral spaces that I had believed them to be.

I returned to Canada with a renewed interest in education. I wanted to make pedagogical codes transparent (hooks, 1994, p. 41). Having recognised the influence of teachers, and having worked as an English teacher myself, I wanted to understand how a teacher's subjectivity might influence a learner's academic future. I recognised that in order to become better attuned to the diverse needs of learners, teachers need to be aware of the influence of their perceptions on learner success, particularly for those belonging to groups labelled as 'falling behind'. Unfortunately, some education programs may negatively contribute to this issue because, as Delpit (1995) argues, 'it is in these programs that teachers learn that poor students and students of colour should be expected to achieve less than their mainstream counterparts' (p. 172). Rather than perpetuate stereotypes, teacher education programs should encourage teachers' critical reflection and challenge educators across disciplines to diversify their teaching practice through the incorporation of alternative ways of knowing and understanding the world (Banks, 1996; Battiste, 2002). All teachers should be familiar with debates surrounding diversity education and of the ways in which their subjectivity contributes to their reluctance to engage in these critical debates. Once teachers understand the potential of increased self-awareness upon learner success, they may be more willing to negotiate and work through the unease that accompanies critical self-reflection.

This article begins by highlighting the assumptions and contradictions embedded within three teaching approaches used commonly to address diverse learners. After critically examining these approaches, I contend that developing courses specifically for or about Indigenous and other marginalised learners in the classroom is less useful than developing teachers' overall ability to critically self-reflect when it comes to ensuring high-level learner engagement. I close with a discussion of educational practices and epistemologies that have had a positive influence over Indigenous learner (and non-Indigenous learner) engagement that are versatile enough to be woven throughout a range of disciplines.

Background

Researchers have discussed the importance of increased educational attainment for Indigenous people in terms of labour integration, greater wage earnings, and future leadership roles in both academic and political institutions (Beresford & Partington, 2003; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Partington & Gray, 2003; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998). Yet, as Indigenous scholar Marie Battiste once wrote, 'no force has been more effective at oppressing First Nations cultures than the education system' (as cited in Silver, Mallett, Greene, & Simard, 2002, p. 163). Goulet (2005) argues that some teachers' practices may reflect 'a belief that the culture of Aboriginal children is inferior' (p. 31). The deficit focus blinds teachers to the strengths Indigenous learners bring into the classroom. The concept of learners 'at risk' places the blame on learners, enabling teachers to evade responsibility for reflecting upon how their behaviour may inhibit learner success, thus creating the illusion that teachers are incapable of 'pedagogical acts of racism that in the wider society would be labeled as racial profiling' (Brandon, 2002, p. 143). This deficit model of understanding may contribute to lowered expectations of Indigenous learners, which could result in lowering their future educational prospects.

Today, more educational researchers point towards racism and discrimination in the wider society and in schools as potential factors impeding Indigenous student achievement (St. Denis, 2004; St. Denis & Hampton, 2002). Some scholars contend that the prioritisation of Eurocentric epistemologies has limited the experience of Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2009) and advocate the integration of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) into academic institutions as one way to alleviate the educational divide. Others claim it is teachers' low expectations that are responsible for lower graduation rates among Indigenous learners and suggest that until teachers' biases are identified and challenged, the educational divide will continue to expand (Riley & Ungerleider, 2008, 2012; Farkas, 2003; Garcia, 2001; Sarra, 2011). The aforementioned researchers agree that more time and effort needs to be invested in educational practices and policies designed to respond to Indigenous learners' needs. Several widespread approaches have been taken towards diversity education, each with variable results. In the next section, I provide a brief overview of each, highlighting why it has had limited success and may perpetuate rather than erase bias.

Three Approaches to Diversity Education

In my practice as teacher educator, the three approaches towards diversity education I most commonly heard cited among pre-service teachers as being 'beneficial' for diversity education were the (a) multicultural approach, (b) cultural revitalisation approach, and (c) 'colour-blind' approach.

Multicultural Education

Kumashiro (2000) argues that rather than attempting to address oppression, a multicultural approach focuses more upon 'what all students — privileged and

marginalised — know and should know about the other' (p. 31), resulting in a curriculum based upon snippets of information that showcase groups perceived as 'different' in relation to the mainstream. Focusing primarily on the 'Other' in an uncritical celebration of difference, a multicultural approach to teaching ignores the value of encouraging teachers and learners to critically reflect upon how their background may shape their perceptions of others. Mainstream ideology is located as the norm to which everything else is compared, allowing those whose identity exists within this framework to remain unaware of their complicity in the oppression of others and potentially reinforcing popular misconceptions about how diverse groups learn, act, or behave (Kumashiro, 2000; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Zygmut-Filwalk & Clark, 2007).

Cultural Revitalisation

The underlying assumption of cultural revitalisation is that educational equity for Indigenous peoples can be achieved through the reclamation of cultural identity (St. Denis, 2004). Unlike the multicultural approach that advocates equality for all, cultural revitalisation promotes Indigenous education as unique and regards the maintenance of traditional language and culture as integral to Indigenous learners' self-esteem and academic success (Duncan & Sokal, 2003; R.A. Malatest & Associates, 2004). However, St. Denis (2004) argues that while cultural revitalisation practices may help reclaim the cultural practices, languages and identities, when taken to its fundamentalist extreme, a cultural revitalisationalist approach can be limiting in its reverence for 'all things past'. Battiste (2002) cautions that perpetuating the notion that IK is somehow sacred and insusceptible to change may reinforce existing stereotypes about what it means to be Indigenous. In addition, Goulet (2005) and St. Denis (2004) argue that this approach undermines the influence of racial discrimination on Indigenous learner success by emphasising psychological issues such as identity, while disregarding the material conditions of learners' lives. Educators using this approach may be more inclined to interpret learners' behaviour as 'cultural' as opposed to 'incorrect' in situations where the educator may have encouraged another learner to excel or try again (Sleeter, 1993, p. 163).

Colour-Blind Approach

A colour-blind mentality encourages teachers to see all learners as 'the same'. Sleeter (1993) states that 'in an effort not to be racist and to treat all children equally, many white teachers try to suppress what they understand about people of colour, which leads them to try not to "see" colour' (p. 162). Yet, according to some researchers (Brophy & Good, 1974; Kolb & Jussim, 1994; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007), the normative dimensions of teachers' expectations may have a greater influence on student evaluations than their cognitive expectations, meaning that learners adhering to the social norms and values of the teacher are more likely to be perceived as brighter and harder working regardless of academic ability. A colour-blind approach to diversity often advantages white learners since they are more familiar with the normative behaviours and values perpetuated in mainstream educational institutions. None of the approaches discussed above attempts to unpack teachers' perceptions and biases.

Why Teachers' Perceptions Matter

Critical multiculturalists and anti-racist theorists argue that attention needs to move beyond the previously discussed approaches to diversity education in order to address the more uncomfortable issues of power, inequity and racism within educational institutions (Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004; Fine, Weis, Powell, & Burns, 2004; Nieto & Bode, 2008). While it is important that teachers understand and appreciate the cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom, this alone does not highlight the more insidious forms of power that create inequitable educational outcomes. Farkas (2003) contends that lower socioeconomic levels and school differences cannot explain the divide between white learners and those of colour, stating that the 'generalized racist attitudes, either conscious or unconscious, on the part of teachers and administrators' (p. 1135) need to be acknowledged as key factors contributing to lower graduation rates among minority learners.

Many studies have indicated that teachers' expectations contribute to the lower achievement of Indigenous and minority learners (Riley & Ungerleider, 2008, 2012; Aaronsohn, Carter, & Howell, 1995; Blau, 2003; Ferguson, 2003; Phillips, Crouse, & Ralph, 1998). Learner perceptions of teachers' expectations can also influence academic success (Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire, & Green, 2004; Marx & Roman, 2002; Smith & Hung, 2008; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Learners from stigmatised groups reminded of negative stereotypes prior to a test in a subject where their group has been deemed unsuccessful did not perform as well (Smith & Hung, 2008; Steele, 1998; Steele & Aronson, 1995). This is in part because individuals in historically stigmatised groups may feel a sense of responsibility towards their ascribed group that in turn could place additional pressure upon individuals to excel in situations where a negative group stereotype could be applied (Aronson et al., 1999; Cadinu, Maass, Frigerio, Impagliazzo, & Latinotti, 2003; Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002).

In a study where Indigenous youth shared their perceptions of how mainstream Australia viewed Indigenous people, Indigenous scholar Chris Sarra (2011) found that some Indigenous youth laughed when the word 'intelligent' was suggested. Sarra reflected, 'It was as if the notion of Aboriginal people being described as intelligent [by mainstream Australia] was some kind of joke' (p. 88), and noted the youths' reaction as a cause for concern. The term *internalisation* describes the process of individuals in a

particular group believing the negative stereotypes ascribed to their group. This process may then lead towards *disidentification*, where individuals disengage with any situation (or institution) where the negative stereotype might be invoked (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Learners who identify with groups negatively stereotyped for their educational performance may choose to focus their energies outside of academic achievement, believing it to be a more attainable validation of self-worth. Teachers who are not aware of their perceptions of the 'Other' may reinforce negative stereotypes. One potential way to raise consciousness is to engage teachers in critical reflection.

Critical Reflection Matters — But May Be Resisted

Since research demonstrates that teachers' perceptions are influenced by their cultural or racial lens (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003; Zygmunt-Filwalk & Clark, 2007), teacher education programs should provide opportunities for teachers to reflect upon how their cultural or racialised status might influence learners' achievement. Like many anti-racist educators, I have used McIntosh's (1998) article 'White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack' to challenge educators to (re)consider how their 'knapsacks' may contain preconceived expectations and assumptions that negatively influence learners. I have experienced the apprehension and resistance of teachers who regard critical self-reflection as an attack on their identity. Teachers commonly respond, 'I love the discussions, but I'm a [insert subject-discipline here] teacher. What does this have to do with me?' In a comparative case study of schools in the United States and Australia, Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist (2003) observed that most diversity programs' electives were taken by a handful of teachers. According to these authors, it is rare to find programs that 'make it compulsory for student teachers to be prepared to teach Indigenous students or cultures in a way that draws from authentic scholarship' (p. 88).

LaDuke (2009) argues that 'pre-service teachers do not change their worldview with a single incident but from formal and informal events and interactions' (p. 43). When courses addressing diversity are included as 'optional' rather than 'transformative' pedagogies (Banks, 1996; Sleeter, 2001) embedded across disciplines, teachers reluctant to use critical self-reflection and consciousness-raising approaches may be more inclined to consider them as 'interesting but irrelevant' for practice. Even teachers genuinely interested in transformative theories may find it difficult to conceptualise how such ideas could fit teaching practices.

Lipsitz (1995) describes white teachers' resistance to critical reflection as a 'possessive investment in whiteness', created by a sense of entitlement consistently reaffirmed in mainstream society's everyday practices and norms (p. 369), a view reinforced by Blau (2003), who claims that

since many white students lack familiarity with their history, they may not recognise how their background shapes their perceptions of others, nor how their unfamiliarity with the communication patterns of minority communities could contribute to the unease some feel when interacting with students of colour. Schick (2000a, 2000b) argues that some white teachers' perceptions of themselves as 'dominant and in control' are contingent upon stereotypical notions of marginalised learners and their own self-identity as a 'benevolent do-gooder', which a critique of Whiteness called into question. Schick (2000a, p. 87) asserts that such perceptions are historically rooted and have become a symbol of respectability that is 'part of a teacher's qualification and access to governance'. As a result, some white teachers do not expect to 'bond' to Indigenous learners in the way they do with those perceived as similar to themselves, and they seek validation through 'the image of teacher as hero' (Schick, 2000b, p. 307).

Carr and Klassen (1997) argued that white teachers who resist the notion of white privilege may also resist anti-racist pedagogies and educational programs designed for working with diversity. They revealed that white teachers were more antagonistic towards anti-racist educational efforts than racialised co-workers, who were more likely to promote anti-racist education, concluding that the white teachers' 'weak understanding of individual and group identity formation' (p .73) might inhibit the implementation of courses designed for anti-racist education unless more self-reflection and self-awareness are promoted among new teachers.

While Indigenous teachers raised in Eurocentric educational institutions may be familiar with white communication patterns, they may also experience anger, disappointment, or guilt when realising the extent to which Eurocentric processes have become embedded into their consciousness (Battiste et al., 2002; Delpit, 1995). Further, factors other than race may influence learner behaviour and so, while identifying with a teacher's racial or cultural background may enhance the bonding between the teacher and learner, it does not ensure a total understanding of each other's experiences (Cabello & Burstein, 1995, p. 289). Diversity awareness courses may be challenging for Indigenous teachers if white teachers depend upon Indigenous colleagues to assist them through their self-realisation process. The fact that Indigenous perspectives are marginalised in teacher education programs may frustrate Indigenous educators who, as a result, may regard these programs as 'something to get through rather than something to learn from' (Delpit, 1995, p. 121). Indigenous educators called upon to re-educate white peers, promote Indigenous epistemologies, and resist daily discrimination, while carrying out the everyday responsibilities of teacher candidate, could be overwhelmed.

Thus, teacher education programs that neglect to embed critical consciousness-raising throughout courses

risk losing Indigenous teacher candidates, especially if there are no support systems in place to provide Indigenous and other minority teachers with spaces to work through the issues unfamiliar to white colleagues (Archibald, Pidgeon, Janvier, Commodore, & McCormick, 2002). In addition, white teacher educators need to recognise that Indigenous and minority colleagues are vulnerable to discrimination within the educational system and so need to act as advocates for promoting and interspersing alternative ways of knowing within each classroom. As Freire (1998) asserts, 'an educational practice in which there is no coherent relationship between what educators say and what they do is a disaster' (p. 72).

Implications for Teacher Education

The dynamics within teacher education programs are reflected in teachers' practices. Students recognise and respond to the teachers' actions and recognise when they are not treating each other with respect. If white students perceive white teachers as impervious to Indigenous colleagues, they may emulate that in interactions with Indigenous peers. Likewise, Indigenous students who feel white teachers are oblivious to their privilege, or who have witnessed them disrespecting Indigenous colleagues, may be less inclined to turn to that teacher for educational support. Finally, Indigenous learners may be less inclined to pursue a teaching career if they perceive Indigenous teachers as isolated, ostracised, or overworked. *All* teachers need to be aware of how to address the educational needs of *all* learners. This means *all* teacher education courses need to encourage new educators to seek information that fosters understanding and identification of the diversity of learners. As Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist (2003) indicated: 'the dilemma is the contradiction between the current practice of teacher education, which offers predominantly assimilationist and Eurocentric programs, and its rhetorical goals, which are those of a culturally diverse and pluralist education' (p. 87). So, the question becomes, how do we transform teacher education and develop a critical consciousness?

Four Cross-Disciplinary Approaches Towards Raising Teachers' Critical Awareness

Rather than developing courses on how to teach Indigenous (and other marginalised) learners that potentially perpetuate rather than eradicate stereotypes, or depending upon pre-service teachers to enrol in social justice courses offered, more scholars advocate the naturalisation of IK and/or other methods that promote critical consciousness-raising strategies (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2009; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). In their study on Indigenous student achievement in science, Bourque, Bouchamma, and Larose (2010) found that no one method worked better for teaching Indigenous learners than non-Indigenous learners: What seemed to work best for *all* was incorporating a variety of methods (p. 68). So, rather than focusing on one method, I discuss four approaches that improve Indigenous engagement and that could be successfully embedded within and encouraged across disciplines throughout teacher education programs.

1. Promoting Indigenous Knowledge (IK)

Harrison and Greenfield (2011) argue that to be taken seriously by Indigenous communities, teachers need to value IK and identity. Yet many teachers remain unsure of the differences between IK and information taught *about* Indigenous peoples (p. 66). Some Indigenous scholars describe IK as 'a way of living within contexts of flux, paradox, and tension, respecting the pull of dualism and reconciling opposing forces' (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000, p. 42). IK, at its essence, is holistic, and so the notion of it being associated with one particular discipline opposes the interconnectedness it promotes. In contrast to a cultural revitalisation approach, IK embraces change, relying upon the interconnectedness between disciplines to integrate new methods, strategies, and practices with old ones. It reaffirms 'the wealth and richness of Indigenous language, world views, teaching, and experiences' traditionally excluded or marginalised from mainstream educational institutions (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2009, p. 5). As an epistemology, IK encourages learners to develop familiarity with the history of their environment on both a macro level (country, society) and a micro level (community, school).

Harrison and Greenfield (2011) advocate using Indigenous perspectives that include 'relationships to place', incorporated into the classroom through inclusion of community knowledge, and a 'strong culture of collaboration among the school and community' (p. 71). Collaborative relationships between Indigenous communities and educational institutions, advocated by a number of educational researchers (Averill, 2012; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Goulet, 2001; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003), promote 'a culture of collaboration' that encourages meaningful consultation with IK holders around curriculum development, as well as advice and support on other issues affecting the educational institution. Rather than teaching *about* Indigenous people in a way that reinforces stereotypes, a culture of collaboration promotes the co-existence of place-based Indigenous ways of knowing with Eurocentric methods and epistemologies.

Some education programs successfully facilitate Indigenous and Western knowledge through team teaching (McGregor, 2005; Morgan & Goldring, 2010). Instructors with expertise on either Indigenous or Western perspectives collaborate to ensure learners accrue the benefits of each and are able to apply or combine either approach to accommodate learners' needs. Other educational institutions encourage consultation with community organisers and Elders before developing and/or modifying school programs, policies, and practices, to ensure changes are in

line with community values (Harrison & Murray, 2013; Sarra, 2011). The transfer of IK across disciplines is not difficult to envision as many subjects could benefit from expertise found from within the community. For example, when developing a course to demonstrate to teacher candidates how to promote sexual health to youth, I consulted with a community youth organisation that specialised in sexual health (Riley, 2014). Together we determined that a team-teaching approach would be most effective. I provided teachers with an understanding of key debates in sexual health education while peer educators shared their 'on-the-ground' experiences of working with youth as trained sexual health peer educators. Youth organisers then worked with teacher candidates to construct sexual health lesson plans that benefitted from collaborative partnerships made with similar sexual health organisations. Within a culture of collaboration, both formal and informal learning approaches associated with multiple perspectives are promoted as equally valid and useful.

Respectful inclusion of IK across disciplines is contingent upon teacher-learners' understanding of this in practice. Teacher educators who build relationships with community-based IK holders and who are seen to challenge existing colonial presumptions will be better able to convince new teachers of the importance of incorporating Indigenous perspectives into classrooms. Innovative teachers will look for additional related resources that highlight alternative perspectives of interest to learners while still advocating for educational reform.

2. Promoting Experiential Learning

Cherubini (2011) states that 'effective pre-service teacher education programs introduce prospective teachers to not only the theoretical implications of teaching diverse student populations, but to an assortment of instructional techniques to engage all students in experiential learning' (p. 3). Experiential learning enables teachers to put newly acquired knowledge and theories into practice and encourages reflection on how well objectives are achieved. Some researchers advocate this approach because it enables teachers to examine, discuss, and consistently re-evaluate their practice, while simultaneously trying new methods that challenge their beliefs (Cabello & Burstein, 1995). By encouraging teacher candidates to experiment with various pedagogical techniques such as cooperative learning (Demmert, 2001), textbook inquiry (Sleeter, Torres, & Laughlin, 2004), visual learning (Sparks, 2000), community partnerships (Goulet, 2001), and culturally responsive pedagogies (Hynds et al., 2011), resistant teachers may be more inclined to modify beliefs and practices because their classroom experience demonstrated the utilisation of such methods as effective.

When teacher candidates question how social issues may be relevant to their discipline, teacher educators from each discipline can encourage candidates to think creatively about course design. Math teachers could be challenged to devise lesson plans that engage learners in critical discussions around poverty, a science class may engage learners in debates around animal ethics, while history teachers could challenge learners to deconstruct how gender, race, and sexuality have been portrayed in school texts over multiple generations. Consistent feedback from colleagues and learners, combined with a teacher's personal reflections, aid in discouraging teachers from becoming dependent upon old techniques or prepackaged resources. Similarly, encouraging teachers to engage in experiences with communities different from their own may ignite a change process that challenges them to reconsider initial perceptions of a particular group or community (Zygmunt-Filwalk & Clark, 2007). Structured immersion strategies that coincide with ongoing race and class analyses may avoid the risk of perpetuating existing stereotypes (LaDuke, 2009; Milner, 2006; Sleeter, 2001). Other concerns related to pedagogical work may also be brought to light, as consistent reflection may highlight reoccurring issues within the classroom. Teachers encouraged to identify solutions to address school concerns may be apt to take more interest in new educational policies and procedures and less likely to view incoming strategies as a challenge to their teaching competency (Bagley, 1992).

3. Promoting 'Caring' as Teaching Practice

Averill (2012) argues that 'effective teacher-student relationships are strongly linked to equitable classrooms in which teachers are attuned to students' backgrounds and needs, and are committed to student achievement' (p. 106). Educational research demonstrates the influence of teachers' behaviour upon student success. Bodkin-Andres, O'Rourke, and Craven (2010) found that targeting domain-specific self-concepts had the strongest predictive power in regard to grades and aspiration for Indigenous *and* non-Indigenous learners. In other words, teachers who are better able to promote a learner's self-concept of their ability to achieve in a discipline will be more likely to increase the learner's success in that domain (p. 299). Averill found that teachers' caring behaviour towards Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners had a positive influence on their mathematical success. Caring behaviours include use of inclusive language, prioritisation of student learning, promotion of high expectations and the inclusion of activities that facilitate classroom community (pp. 117–118). While none of these behaviours is intrinsically tied to the mathematical learning, Averill's research indicates 'that lessons exhibiting the most caring teacher behaviours and practices were those with greatest student engagement' (p. 121). Findings also suggest that learners attending classes where teachers exhibited less caring behaviour were 'more likely to exhibit off-task, disruptive, unresponsive, and challenging behaviour' (p. 121). Educating teachers on best practices that promote caring teacher-student relationships and build upon a learner's

self-concept may ensure all learners have equal access to educational opportunities.

Research (Cook-Sather, 2007, Martin & Hand, 2009) has shown that student outcomes improve when students are provided with the opportunity to have an influence over their learning. In New Zealand, Te Kothitanga (Hynds et al., 2011) is an approach to teacher professional development that 'is grounded in Maori student narratives about what does and does not work for them as learners in school' (p. 342). Teachers are encouraged to use a relational approach towards teaching as a way to decrease deficit thinking and ensure positive outcomes. A reciprocal relationship between teachers and students is encouraged as teachers are invited to share 'their own lives and interests' with learners, while learners are encouraged to take 'responsibility for their own and others' learning and behaviour' (p. 346). Participating teachers noted that this reciprocal approach resulted in teachers' increased understanding of Maori culture and language as well as increased Maori learner engagement.

4. Promoting High Expectations

Sarra (2011) states that Indigenous underachievement 'is underpinned at best by ignorance about what Indigenous children in schools can achieve, and at worst by racist beliefs that the learning capacity of Indigenous children is somehow inferior to that of other categories of students' (p. 161). Pre-service teachers are often disturbed when they learn about the devaluing of Indigenous learners in educational institutions, yet the recognition of historical injustices can contribute to a congratulatory ethos regarding 'how far we have come'.

In order to help facilitate higher expectations among teachers with regards to their Indigenous learners, I facilitated two studies on how teachers' expectations influence Indigenous learner placement (Riley & Ungerleider, 2008, 2012). In each study, teachers participated in a decision-making exercise where they responded to 24 fictional student record cards for Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, and ESL learners. The records were identical within four achievement levels from low to high. Teachers were asked to place cards in folders labelled 'supplementary learning assistance', 'regular achievement', and 'advanced achievement'. In the second study, teachers were additionally invited to explain their decisions. Both studies revealed that some teachers placed Aboriginal and ESL record cards in lower level classes despite their identical grades. I have used these studies and record cards as a tool to encourage teachers to consider the influence their biases may have upon decision-making.

In one class, the studies were used to discuss the subtlety of expectations and biases. In small groups, pre-service teachers considered teachers' placement of students and provided reasons for their decisions. This exercise demonstrated that while the intent may not have been discriminatory, a decision influenced by unchecked biases could disadvantage learners. Recognising teachers' susceptibility towards unintentionally disadvantaging certain students, pre-service teacher-learners were willing to acknowledge and reflect upon their stereotypes and biases. In another exercise, teachers were invited to place fictional student record cards into folders labelled as noted above. Each group recorded the factors considered as they placed the student record cards, as well as any additional factors they wished they could access. Teachers were asked to imagine that their teaching resume would be evaluated upon similar factors, and then invited to 'strike out' factors they would not want to be evaluated upon and explain why. After the exercise, teachers returned to their groups and made changes they deemed necessary regarding student placement decisions.

These two activities and accompanying studies alerted teacher-learners that discrimination is not always overt, but can be subtle and sometimes well intentioned. Teacher-learners came to appreciate the need to devote time to consciousness-raising activities because they identified the reasons why such practices were important to their future learners.

Conclusion

Too often, some teacher candidates enter into education programs wanting only step-by-step guidelines on 'how' to teach their discipline. Sometimes, teachers expect this prescriptive approach to extend on to certain groups of learners. Yet, while each discipline may indeed have specific learning outcomes to be met, there are multiple ways in which to reach those outcomes. And while one learning method may enable an individual within a group to thrive, a different approach may be more suitable to another. Cherubini (2011) argues that 'teacher education programs need to foster a deep understanding in student-teachers of cultural norms other than their own. This begins with the critical examination of their attitudes, knowledge, and epistemologies' (p. 3). For teacher education programs to truly meet the needs of Indigenous learners, or indeed of any learner, more value needs to be placed upon encouraging critical discussions across disciplines about how teachers' behaviours, values, and teaching methods may influence learner achievement. While this article has highlighted the various learning blocks teacher candidates may encounter along the way, it also introduces approaches towards teaching and learning that extend across disciplines. By embedding the aforementioned practices across disciplines, all teachers, regardless of their specialisation, will have insight into how subtle actions and behaviours may negatively or positively influence the learners they teach.

As teacher educators, we are challenged to recognise moments of dissonance in teacher candidates and seize these moments as opportunities to model the four aforementioned practices. Principles of IK can be used by

teacher educators to validate the resistance that may arise as teacher candidates confront years of cognitive oppression, enabling learners to better 'move through paralyzing emotions such as anger, defensiveness, grief, guilt, and denial to enable empowering feelings such as empathy, hope, and sense of responsibility' (Anuik & Gillies, 2012, p. 73). Likewise, all teacher educators can use their specialisation as a way to connect with community members around a topic of interest, making learning more meaningful. Equally, all teacher educators can model experiential learning by employing a variety of teaching methods in their classroom. Each of these approaches will demonstrate to candidates that one need not be dependent upon any one style of delivery to achieve learning objectives. Caring practices can be implemented by all teacher educators through the sharing of one's teaching stories and by encouraging teaching candidates to do the same, through the provision of opportunities to reflect upon practicum highs and lows with peers.

Finally, as teacher educators we can, regardless of the subjects we teach, create an atmosphere of high expectations by believing in the potential all teacher candidates have to move beyond the challenges that inevitably come with critical reflection. The adaptable nature of the teaching practices and epistemologies advocated within this article make them applicable to an ethnically diverse classroom, as well as to a range of disciplines. Embedding these practices across disciplines may help to raise the awareness of *all teachers*, thus advocating continued dialogue around diversity that is open to multiple interpretations and multiple possibilities.

Acknowledgments

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About the Author

Tasha Riley is an Arts, Education, and Law (AEL) postdoctoral research fellow for the Griffith Institute for Educational Research (GIER) at Griffith University, in Brisbane, Australia. Her research interests focus in the areas of Indigenous education, teacher education, and critical pedagogy. Prior to her return to academia, Riley worked as the education coordinator for a community health organisation in Vancouver, Canada. Riley has published in the fields of Indigenous education, sexual health education, and teacher development. Her current research focuses on how teachers' expectations influence Indigenous learners' educational success.