Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2002 Carfax Publishing
Taylor & Francis Group

Student Teachers' Resistance to Exploring Racism: reflections on 'doing' border pedagogy

NADO AVELING, *Murdoch University, Australia*

ABSTRACT *While teachers have a responsibility to teach in a way that is anti-discriminatory and inclusive of all students irrespective of students' gender, 'race'/ethnicity, social class, disability or sexual orientation, in this paper my focus is on 'race' and racism and the ways in which some teacher education students resist examining their own racialised assumptions. Given that 'race' is invariably constructed in terms of the 'Other', it is imperative, as Gillborn (1996, p. 165) has suggested in the British context, for whites to 'reflect critically on their own assumptions and actions as whites'. It is equally imperative in Australia for 'white' researchers and teachers who are committed to anti-racism to turn the gaze inward and to reflect on our own racialised assumptions. Within this context one of the key concerns of this paper is the extent to which teacher education students can be given the freedom to express their views and explore their value positions without however slipping over into perpetuating racist stereotypes.*

Introduction

Racism—the word nobody likes. Whites who don't want to confront Racism and who don't name themselves white recoil in horror from it, shun it like the plague. To mention the word in their company disrupts their comfortable complacency. To call a text or methodology under discussion in a classroom or conference 'racist', or to call a white person on her or his Racism, is to let loose a stink bomb. … Racism is a slippery subject, one which evades confrontation, yet one which overshadows every aspect of our lives. … Making others 'uncomfortable' in their Racism is one way of 'encouraging' them to take a stance against it. (Anzaldua, 1990, p. xix)

The sorts of questions regarding student teachers' resistance to exploring their own racism which I will be raising in this paper are grounded in my experiences with teaching pre-service teacher education students—the majority of whom are 'white'—within the context of a Unit called *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education.* As the title suggests the scope is broad, encompassing political/historical, theoretical and curricular perspectives. The over-arching objective of *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education* is to equip initial teacher education students with an understanding of what it might mean to teach: (1) Aboriginal Studies; (2) Aboriginal students; and (3) non-Indigenous students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds.

While multicultural education is generally seen to be about the 'Other' and taught in ways in which the 'dominating aspects of white culture are not called into question and the oppositional potential of difference as a site of struggle is muted', it is one of my aims in this Unit to 'affirm and interrogate the histories, memories and stories of the devalued others who have been marginalised from the official discourse of the canon' (Giroux, 1992, p. 101) and to examine how the 'boundaries of ethnicity, race and

ISSN 1359-866X print; ISSN 1469-2945 online/02/020119-12
© 2002 Australian Teacher Education Association
DOI: 10.1080/13598660220135630

power make visible how whiteness functions as a historical and social construction' (Giroux, 1992, p. 117). In other words, *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education* is about letting loose 'the stinkbomb' and to make my students (as well as myself) 'uncomfortable in [our] Racism' and to encourage all of us to 'take a stance against it'.

The data on which I draw were gathered from three cohorts of students, each with an annual enrolment of approximately 150 students (1996–1998) from both internal and external students and from a variety of students' writings such as essays, critiques, reading journals, anonymous student evaluations conducted by the University's Teaching and Learning Centre, as well as comments made during tutorial discussions. In this paper I will reflect on a number of pedagogical concerns focussing specifically on one group of student teachers that consistently emerged within each cohort. Those students firmly refused to 'see' colour as a means of establishing their non-racist credentials and became defensive when their assumptions were challenged (approximately 10% of each cohort). I have chosen to focus on this group because these students represent my 'failures' as a teacher educator.

The Challenge of 'Doing' Border Pedagogy

My teaching is grounded within a critical pedagogy that sees teaching 'as a form of social criticism' and takes seriously the call to rethink the nature of university teachers' role 'with respect to issues of politics, social responsibility, and the construction of a pedagogy of possibility' (Giroux, 1992, p. 105). In constructing a critical pedagogy that allows me to teach *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education* in a way that approximates the way I believe it ought of be taught, I am much indebted to Henry Giroux who lucidly argues for a 'border pedagogy' which resonates with the way I think about and approach the practice of teaching. Giroux suggested that:

> ... border pedagogy is a process that is intent on challenging existing boundaries of knowledge and creating new ones, border pedagogy offers the opportunity for students to engage the multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences and languages. This means educating students to both read these codes historically and critically while simultaneously learning the limits of such codes, including the ones they use to construct their own narratives and histories. ... Students should engage knowledge as border-crossers, as people moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power.
> (Giroux, 1992, p. 29)

Within the context of learning to challenge existing boundaries of knowledge and to read cultural codes historically and critically, it is crucial to 'turn the gaze inward' and interrogate what it means to be 'white'. Given that in the past discussions about 'race' and race relations have invariably been focused on the Other, it is not surprising that whiteness is frequently invisible except as an 'unmarked category ...] that is implicitly opposed to Aboriginals or Asians' (Palmer, 1995, p. 131). With my students, therefore, I am concerned to explore the invisibility of whiteness and the ways in which whiteness confers privileges on many of us who are white, recognising that whiteness is not a monolithic category but, as Frankenberg has suggested is:

> ... in no way a transhistorical essence. Rather ... it is a completely constructed product of local, regional, national, and global relations, past and present ... it is also a relational category, one that is co-constructed with a range of

> other racial and cultural categories, with class and with gender. This co-construction is, however, fundamentally asymmetrical, for the term 'whiteness' signals the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage.
> (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 236)

Thus, within the context of my teaching I am concerned to deconstruct whiteness (at a particular site with specific groups of people) with the explicit aim of 'progressing the work of understanding and dismantling racism' (Drurie, 2000, p. 2).

However, if as Giroux has suggested, critical pedagogy needs to explore a language of possibility that is capable of thinking risky thoughts, that engages in a project of hope, and points to the horizon of not yet, then it is not surprising that some students became frustrated, even angry, because there seemed to be so many questions and so few concrete strategies to apply in the classroom. For many students *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education* occupied a space that was about an Other who was somehow peripheral to the 'real' business of schools and education. A number of students talked about the problems of teaching students whose culturally specific learning styles must be acknowledged but who must, at the same time, be assisted to become proficient in dominant cultural codes if they are to succeed in the 'mainstream'. Given the pervasiveness of such assimilationist and compensatory perspectives it seemed to me, therefore, that it is imperative to work with students 'to transform the languages, social practices, and histories that are part of the colonial inheritance' and to engage in a border pedagogy that 'speaks with rather than for the Other' (Giroux, 1992, p. 28).

Learning to speak with, rather than for the Other is, however, easier said than done especially in a context where power relationships are patently unequal because in the final analysis the responsibilities for awarding grades always rest with the course coordinator. However, in order to begin to learn to speak with the Other, students need not only to learn to listen to the stories of the Other, they also need to be able to interrogate their own assumptions and racialised subject positions; to understand the codes 'they [we] use to construct their own narratives and histories'. And herein lies the rub. While my students found listening to the stories of the Other to be relatively 'easy'—that is, they enjoyed the autobiographical narratives of writers like Sally Morgan, Glenys Ward, Ruby Langford and Alice Nannup, for example, but found it more difficult to engage in dialogue with Indigenous people 'in the flesh'—interrogating our/their assumptions and racialised subject positions has been fraught with a great many difficulties, both for my students and myself.

In theory I wholeheartedly endorse the notion that student teachers be offered the opportunity to 'air their feelings about race from the perspective of the subject positions they experience as constitutive of their own identities' (Giroux, 1992, p. 137) but in practice I frequently found it extremely difficult to continue to give some students the freedom to express their views and explore their value positions when those views were racist in the extreme. For example, one student often couched tutorial contributions in terms that were offensive to 'minority' peoples. While other students attempted to point this out to this particular student, the student in question persisted to use derogatory terms with a smile and a shrug and comments like 'I know, I know, I'm not being politically correct, but I don't mean anything by it'. What concerned me, and continues to do so, is striking a balance between the ways in which I used my position of authority to ultimately silence this student and between allowing students to explore their subject

positions when this appeared to give tacit consent to being able to articulate gross racist stereotypes. The essential dilemma for me was in determining the point at which I should step in and say to students like the one cited above: 'you're entitled to your opinion but you are not entitled to air those opinions in class' (or words to that effect). While I took seriously Giroux's suggestion that border pedagogy 'does not silence in the name of its own ideological fervour or correctness', it frequently seemed to me, however, that I needed to use my position of final arbiter of course grades (which I suspect, students understood better than my desire to foster open dialogue) to silence some students in order to protect the freedom of others. This is an issue I will take up later in this paper.

Discursive Repertoires of 'Race'

My challenge (as a white educator myself embedded within, and struggling with, a social reality that is racialised, gendered and class-based) is to create an educational setting within which all students move from essentialist understandings of 'race' and gender to ones which enable them to take cognisance of their own racialised and gendered positioning in order to become more effective anti-discriminatory practitioners. It is interesting to note that within the context of this Unit, gender did not appear to be a contentious issue for the majority of these students. Perhaps this had something to do with the fact that they had been alerted to gender issues during much of their undergraduate study and had generally—if somewhat superficially—taken this on board. On issues of race, however, the core teacher education curriculum is often strangely silent. My analysis in this paper will, therefore, focus on race—without necessarily privileging race over social class or gender—because this was the area that was most problematic for students, realising fully that racialised positions are always gendered and gendered positions always racialised.

Despite its common-sense interpretation, 'race' is a word that is heavily contested, both politically and academically. Despite conceptual difficulties, race continues to be used as an analytic concept, because the effects of positioning people according to their perceived 'race' continue to have real material consequences for groups of people who experience racism in its varied manifestations. Moreover, the questions of what exactly constitutes racism is highly problematic. What has emerged over the last decade or so is an acknowledgment of the complexities of racism; that racism is 'not a static, fixed, or coherent set of beliefs that uniformly influences the way individuals think and behave regardless of context' (Connolly, 1996, p. 174) and that it cannot, as Troyna (1993) pointed out, be explained by a single, simple cause. The work of Rizvi (1993) in Australia and Gillborn (1995) in the United Kingdom, for example, demonstrate just how contradictory racist beliefs and practices are and how they are located in quite specific contexts and sets of social relations. Thus, 'it is no longer useful … to speak of racism as if it were an homogeneous phenomenon' (Castles, 1996, p. 18).

Despite some exceptions, students had learned early in *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education* that they would be challenged—not only by me but also by other students—if they openly expressed racist views. One of the strategies, therefore, that a number of student teachers employed was to preface their contributions to tutorial discussions with the phrase 'I'm not a racist, but …'. In thinking through the resistance of this small group of students and why this might be happening, the work of a number of theorists provided valuable insights which in different but related ways resonated with my own experiences with my students.

Addressing the complex concept of race, Ruth Frankenberg (1993) suggested that we think in terms of a discursive repertoire that each of us has at her disposal, within which 'race' can be made meaningful. She identified three historical moments and suggests that one way to describe these three moments is in terms of shifts from 'difference' to 'similarity' and then 'back' to difference, radically redefined.

> The first shift, then, is from a first moment that I will call 'essentialist racism', with its emphasis on race difference understood in hierarchical terms of essential, biological inequality, to a discourse of essential 'sameness' popularly referred to as 'colour-blindness'—which I have chosen to name as a double move toward 'colour-evasiveness' and 'power-evasiveness'. The second moment asserts that we are all the same under the skin; that is, culturally we are converging; that materially, we have the same chance in ...] society; and that—the sting in the tail—any failure to achieve is therefore the fault of people of colour themselves. The third moment insists once again on difference, but in a form very different from that of the first moment. Where the terms of essentialist racism were set by the white dominant culture, in the third moment they are articulated by people of colour. Where difference within the terms of essentialist racism alleges the inferiority of people of colour, in the third moment difference signals autonomy of culture, values, aesthetic standards, and so on. And, of course, inequality in this third moment refers not to ascribed characteristics, but to the social structure. I will refer to this discursive repertoire as one of 'race cognisance'.
> (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 14)

While Frankenberg's work is grounded within the United States, I believe that parallels can be drawn with the Australian context. In Australia—to briefly recapitulate a history that is generally well-known and certainly well-documented elsewhere (see for example, Jamrozik *et al.* 1995; Castles *et al.*, 1988)—assimilationist policies marked a period of essentialist racism that was clearly premised on the perceived superiority of those who were of 'British stock'. As Perera and Pugliese have pointed out

> The policy of assimilation saw Indigenous languages outlawed, cultural practices and rituals banned, tribal and customary law annulled, the enforced displacement of people from their birthlands and consequent enclosure within arbitrarily located missions and, most devastating of all, the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their parents.
>
> For people of non-English speaking background (NESB), the doctrine of assimilation demanded that they divest themselves of any cultural and linguistic practices which were seen as unacceptable to the model of a monocultural, anglo-centric Australia.
> (Perera & Pugliese, 1997, 14)

With the demise of the 'White Australia' policy in the early 1970s, Australia reinvented itself 'as a site of cultural diversity rather than an economic and cultural monolith'. Within a multicultural Australia cultural differences were to be maintained, supported and celebrated. In reality, however, the 'fundamental sociological realities of structural incorporation/exclusion' remained unchanged and largely unchallenged (Castles *et al.*, 1988, p. 78). The form of multiculturalism that 'celebrates' difference without paying attention to structural inequalities and asserts that we are all the same under the skin—and if we work but hard enough we all have the same chance to succeed—

corresponds to the second moment identified by Frankenberg. Given the current political climate in Australia, headed by a government whose leader's style and rhetoric harkens back to the 'the good old days' of a monocultural Australia when 'Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities knew their minoritised places in the Anglo-Australian mainstream scheme of things' (Perera & Pugliese, 1997, p. 14), it is not surprising that the third moment—articulated by voices who argue for self-determination, who maintain that race makes a difference in people's lives and who insist that racism is a significant factor in society—remains in the margins.

The first moment reflects crude or essentialist racism, but despite the rhetoric of multiculturalism this moment remains, as Frankenberg has pointed out 'paradigmatic of racism' (1993, p. 139). Thus my students did not consider themselves to be racist because they believed that they treated everyone equally and because they did not engage in overt racist acts. They liked to think of themselves as the sorts of prospective teachers who would treat all students the same, and hence equitably, irrespective of the colour of their skin. For many of my students essentialist forms of racism seemed relatively simple to address within educational settings because such practices were anathema to them and because they felt that racism thus defined would respond readily to education; that it was merely a case of educating those individuals who were 'bad, mad or misinformed, or even stupid' (Pettman, 1992, p. 56).

The second moment, which Frankenberg refers to as colour/power-evasiveness, arises out of the first and is an ongoing response to that moment and frequently manifests as an attempt not to see colour at all. This was much more difficult to come to grips with because my students believed that to 'see' colour would constitute a form of racism. Many of my students (like the white women interviewed by Frankenberg) thus preferred to think in terms of 'we are all the same under the skin' and frequently professed that 'race does not matter'. Such colour blindness, rather than being non-racist is a form of racism because it denies the identity of the Other and at the same time it ignores power structures that privilege one group over another on the basis of their 'race'. One of my student teachers wrote, for example:

> In the town where I live, the Aboriginal population is very high ... both my parents are from England so contact with Aboriginals has been minimal. Colour and race, means nothing in my eyes ... my best friend during high school was a Sri Lankan girl.

This student, while aware of the colour of her Sri Lankan friend—possibly using the friendship to establish her non-racist credentials—liked to think of herself as colour-blind while at the same time suggesting that her parents' English-ness acted as a barrier to establishing friendships with Aboriginal people despite the fact that 'the Aboriginal population [was] very high'.

Certainly, it seemed to me that some of my students in thinking through 'race' and grappling with what it means to be a non-racist teacher showed evidence of drawing on the discursive repertoires identified by Frankenberg. Given the three historical moments of and responses to racism, I do not mean to imply that these ways of thinking through race were mutually exclusive or that they formed a discrete hierarchy of thinking and that my students exhibited, for example, behaviours that were characteristic of essentialist racism to the exclusion of anything else, or that students who exhibited aspects of colour and power-evasiveness were not also capable of moments of race cognisance.

Over the years and within each cohort of students remarkably consistent patterns of responses have emerged. The annual evaluations, for example, elicited responses year after year that were variations on 'but I didn't know' and 'why weren't we taught this before?'. Many students have commented that they had learned much (especially from the Aboriginal culture educators), and all expressed a commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies. Students were enthusiastic and their 'hearts seemed to be in the right place'. Despite their enthusiasm, however, many students' essays tended not to reflect a great shift in consciousness from a paternalistic 'wanting to help those less fortunate' than themselves—who are essentially 'the same under the skin'—to examining their own position of privilege. By and large, white hegemony remained unchallenged and the tendency to romanticise Aboriginal students and their culture or to construct them as 'deficient' continued.

In general terms, however, all my students have agreed over the years that racism is a 'bad thing'. Certainly few of us would want to be thought of as racist. Thus the students I teach wholeheartedly support, for example, the notion that 'all staff and students recognise that racist practices in education and training are unacceptable' (Key Outcomes of the National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 1996–2002, Priority 4) but many student teachers had difficulties in recognising racist practices when they saw them because they had not themselves directly experienced racism and furthermore, because they had naturalised the institutions and practices in which they occur.

Framing the majority—who were willing but had difficulties in examining their own assumptions and who continued to want to naturalise their own culture as the one against which all others needed to be measured up—were two other groups of student teachers: the first group consisted of students who were able to confront the implications of their social positioning within a racialised society and who were able to entertain the possibility that their whiteness had conferred certain privileges on them. A second smaller but vocal group who, when confronted with historical evidence, was of the opinion that 'things might have been bad then' but that 'things were better now'. These students, like others before them, found it difficult to deal with the fact that 'racism is not a past sin belonging to some anonymous white people' (McIntyre, 1997, p. 664) and at times became angry at what they perceived as my 'bending over backwards' to accommodate minority group perspectives and my failure to address what they called 'reverse' racism towards whites. These student teachers became personally offended and attempted to come to terms with their own discomfort by externalising their resistance and by rejecting the subject material as 'politically correct' and therefore not to be taken too seriously.

White Defensiveness

White defensiveness is not something that is unique to this group of student teachers. It is, rather, a response that other teacher educators, working with similar groups of white teacher education students, have noted, both in Australia (Ryan, 1997) and elsewhere (McIntyre, 1997; Rosenberg, 1997). White defensiveness is, moreover, something that is increasingly becoming part of the Australian political landscape of the 1990s as non-Anglo minorities and Indigenous people are:

> … scripted as the majority who have control of the key organs—governmental, bureaucratic, institutional and media—of power [and] white, mainstream

> Anglo-Australians are now to be seen as marginalised, persecuted and silenced majority.
> (Perera & Pugliese, 1997, pp. 8–9)

Leslie Roman, in her provocative article 'White is a Colour!' suggested that white defensiveness could be understood as 'the relative assertion that whites, like 'people of colour', are history's oppressed subjects of racism' (1993, p. 71). Certainly, the student who complained about 'white anglo males [being] the most oppressed group in Australian society today' drew on the discourse of competing victim status. Whether as a defence to being unable to see and to deal with the implications of having taken for granted certain privileges conferred on him on the basis of his whiteness or for some other reason, I do not know. If I remember correctly, however, he was the student who often sat sullenly silent or when moved to speak, prefaced his contributions to tutorial discussions with 'I'm not a racist, but …'.

As McIntyre has shown, students' discovery of how much their lives and the lives of people of colour have been affected by racism is apt to result in a kind of cognitive dissonance that makes it possible 'to begin conversations about the racial inequalities in society, at the same time that it generates a level of discomfort that made it almost impossible to sustain such a discussion' (1997, p. 664). Given my understanding of listening to and speaking with students, it seems to me that defensiveness raised its head at the moment when students (or indeed any of us) were confronted with 'seeing race' and the ways in which some racialised positions are privileged over others; when it was no longer possible for them to pretend that 'race does not matter'. Students' writing reflected the ways in which they dealt with this: some took the implications of their 'seeing' on board and moved to moments of being race cognisant; others were beginning to 'see race' but retreated, I suspect, from the full implications of their seeing. Just how to move beyond such defensiveness with those few students who continued to see racism as something that did not apply to them because they did not engage in what they perceived to be acts of racism, is a question that continues to haunt me.

To begin to understand why some students continued to resist my efforts to engage them with the material presented in this Unit, it is useful to take a closer look at the objections students expressed in the end-of-year evaluations. Some students were unhappy because they felt that 'too much' was being taught about Aboriginal issues. As the title of the Unit suggests *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education* deals with both Aboriginal and multicultural issues as they relate to education in its broadest sense. Thus some students believed that strictly equal time should be given to the two strands mentioned in the title. Some were aggrieved because they felt that this was not so, others were positively strident in their condemnation of what they felt was a betrayal of some equity principle. Some students commented:

> The course needs to have an equal emphasis on Aboriginal and Multicultural education—otherwise change the title.

> Emphasis on multicultural aspect and not purely the aboriginal (sic) aspect of society.

> Less emphasis on broader Ab (sic) issues.

I do not believe that these students' complaints are based in much real evidence given the structure of the Unit. I suspect that some students began to feel uncomfortable when the 'natural' order of how much time is spent on what or whom,

became unbalanced. Certainly for this small group of students approximately 'equal time' was too much and was enough to raise the spectre of whites as the 'marginalised, persecuted and silenced majority' (Perera & Pugliese, 1997, p. 8).

Other objections were directed at guest speakers. Generally, the diversity provided by guest speakers was much appreciated and community members were always made welcome and treated with respect. In fact, one external student wrote: 'Would it be possible to inform external students when guest speakers will be attending the uni? I've heard they were really great'. Certainly community members who agreed to speak gave unstintingly of themselves in telling their stories and facilitating dialogue. The student who commented rather curtly that 'some guest speakers didn't really seem to be saying anything of relevance', was most assuredly not listening. What provoked the ire of some was what they felt to be 'inappropriate language'; I suspect that they would have found something to complain about anyway, however Jack (not his real name) gave them an opportunity to voice their frustration when, in answer to someone's question about his life he said: 'It was bloody hard'. Given students' enthusiasm for autobiographical narratives, it seemed that it was easier for these students to read sanitised versions about how hard life used to be in the past, than to confront the story of someone who was right there in the room and whose history of hardship and deprivation continues into the present. Thus a few students felt it was necessary to point out to me that in future years *Aboriginal and Multicultural Education* would be much improved if I were to seek 'better qualified' speakers.

> Some of the lecturers could be of better quality (guest speakers)—that is some speakers didn't speak for long enough and some felt it was all right to swear in lectures—many people felt that kind of behaviour was unnecessary.

> Some of the guest lecturers were sub-standard and did not behave in a manner appropriate for university—one man in particular used expletives as a means of expressing himself—although the subject matter was interesting his swearing turned me off his lecture.

The first student appeared to want to distance him/herself by commenting 'many people felt that kind of behaviour was unnecessary'. Certainly the second student's use of the term 'sub-standard' is something that could usefully be explored in discussions about varieties of spoken language with future students.

During tutorial discussions some students had expressed anger and hostility to me because they felt that they needed to be 'politically correct' in order to get good marks. Popular discourse—promulgated from the prime minister down—has denigrated the phrase 'political correctness' into something that is the antithesis of 'free speech'; something that is in fact, un-Australian. Thus the accusation that I should stop being 'politically correct' surfaced more regularly than I had anticipated, as a handful students exhorted me to 'present a balanced perspective [and] not stick to an extreme point of view'. One student in particular suggested that 'it would be wise to ensure that in future this course moves away from being a politically correct one and start dealing with the real world'. I can only guess at the sorts of things this student had in mind when exhorting me to 'start dealing with the real world' or according to whose definition it 'would be wise ....'.

In thinking through my own reactions I know that I bristled at the idea of having to put myself as well as the other students through some of the racist ramblings based on some of the students' experiences with Indigenous people that they wanted to pass

off as the ultimate 'truth' because it had happened to them. I tried to be accepting—obviously with limited success—but there came a time when 'enough was enough'. Given my commitment to critical pedagogy this is an on-going area of concern. I do not want to silence students because I do not believe that this is a useful learning strategy. On the other hand, it raises the question about the point at which I, as an educator have the responsibility to silence individual students in the interests of students as a group. For some students I erred massively. These students lost no time telling me so.

> Students should be warmly invited to speak their minds—even the negative aspects of Aboriginality—they definitely do exist—how can anything be resolved if it is swept under the carpet, so to speak—don't say it's not related to education and the classroom.
>
> Not a safe, comfortable environment to explore and discuss ideas for fears of censorship.
>
> I felt I was forced to take on her views—otherwise I would not get anywhere with my marks.
>
> A lot of people were very angry and didn't say what they really thought—this Unit should encourage people to work through their ideas but it doesn't.
>
> Need to be more accepting of different point of view—try to be less hostile towards white males.

In Anzaldua's terms I had succeeded in making these students 'uncomfortable in their Racism' but I had been woefully unsuccessful in 'encouraging them to take a stance against it'. The question of how best to provide a space for all students to air their views without appearing to 'put them down' remains unresolved.

From Defensiveness to 'Race' Cognisance

Those students who were able to take the necessary first step in confronting their own 'uncomfortableness' provide a useful foil for those students who resisted confronting their own racism by allowing me to ask such questions as: 'Why these students and not others?', 'What was it about my teaching (if anything) that allowed these students to critically examine their own assumptions?' and finally, 'What, if anything, have I missed about the students who continue to resist?'

Given that education cannot provide a panacea for all our racist ills it is nevertheless worth remembering that 'Schools cannot solve the problem of racism in our society. But they should surely not contribute to it' (Lacey, quoted in Gillborn, 1990, p. 1). That comment resonated deeply with many of my students. One of them wrote in her journal:

> After reading that statement … I felt rather deflated, thinking 'I didn't even know I may be contributing to racism in schools. So how can I go about reducing its effects?'

Thus, acknowledging our ignorance is the necessary first step of moving from a position of defensiveness to being able to 'see colour' and our own racialised complicity within a paradigm that evades power. Education can be a powerful tool for combating racism but the process is certainly on-going with many false starts and moments of back-sliding. As the following comments indicate the process is also frequently painful:

> The other day at the railway station there was an Indigenous person who appeared drunk and who was behaving in a threatening way, swearing at the white people and waving his arms about. A colleague of mine said 'what a useless race of people'; another remarked on how Tasmania had been the only state which had fixed the problem for good. They shared a laugh, comfortable with their shared solidarity. What did I say? Nothing at the time! Coward!
>
> At a party many were gathered around discussing the Aboriginals in the town, saying all they needed was a bomb. They apparently get too much money which they waste on drugs, Chicken Treat and alcohol. This made me feel uncomfortable and I just wanted to leave.

As their journals indicate these student were eventually able to confront colleagues and friends. In other words, once they had been made uncomfortable they could not help but eventually take a stance against racism. For other students the process seemed to be similarly painful. These students wrote that even though it had been difficult for them, they appreciated being able to explore issues of racism:

> It has been challenging and rewarding—examining my own prejudices and beliefs has been hard at times but I am conscious that there have been some real changes.
>
> Had some very good debates and raised many awkward if not impossible questions.
>
> Confronting racism in an educated/insightful way—I didn't realise quite how bigoted I really was/am.
>
> Learning to understand my own racism and the way stereotypes are constructed.
>
> Examining my own thoughts/feelings on racism/social justice.

For these students, and others like them, engaging with material that had been confronting had been worthwhile: they had been able to raise questions with respect to how 'the dominant self is always present in the construction of the margins' (Giroux, 1992, p. 117) and will, I am confident, continue to struggle with these questions in their own professional praxis.

Conclusion

In this paper I raised a series of complex questions regarding students' resistance to exploring their own racism as well as offering some reflections on my approaches to enabling students to become 'border-crossers'. I am still not sure about the ways in which I use my authority to silence students who seem to want to go on and on (and on) about their experiences with, and therefore their understanding of Indigenous peoples. There are times when I have felt that I was too intolerant of some students' early attempts to rethink their position *vis-a-vis* 'race'. At other times I believed that my silences would only serve to condone what amounted to little more than white posturing, drawing attention to itself as the latest victim of 'political correctness'. In sum, I still do not know to the answer to my question 'At what point should educators step in and say to their students, 'You're entitled to your opinion but you are not entitled to air those opinions in class'?

However, as Rosenberg has pointed out 'we are naive to think that exploring race and racism with white students will be a teaching performance like any other'. It is moreover

an enormous challenge for all of us to 'participate in an engaged pedagogy'. In the final analysis,

> since there is no prescription for engaged pedagogy, we all must negotiate our own knowledge, authority, and experience around these issues with ourselves as well as our students, taking care to recognise the contextual nature of this work.
> (Rosenberg, 1997, p. 87)

Correspondence: Nado Aveling, Murdoch University, Australia.

REFERENCES

ANZALDUA, G. (1990) *Making Face, Making Soul: creative and critical perspectives by feminists of color* (San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books).

CONNOLLY, P. (1996) Seen but never heard: rethinking approached to researching racism and young children, *Discourse*, 17(2), pp. 171–183.

CASTLES, S. (1996) The racism of globalisation, in: VASTA & CASTLES (Eds) *The Teeth are Smiling: the persistence of racism in multicultural Australia*, pp. 17–45 (Sydney, Allen & Unwin).

CASTLES, S., KALANTZIS, M., COPE, B. & MORRISEY, M. (1988) *Mistaken Identity: multiculturalism and the demise of nationalism in Australia* (Sydney, Pluto Press).

DRURIE, J. (2000) Writing whiteness in the West: no single white body, paper presented to the *Third International Cultural Studies Conference*, Birmingham, UK, July.

FRANKENBERG, R. (1993) *The Social Construction of Whiteness: white women, race matters* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota).

GILLBORN, D. (1990) *'Race', Ethnicity and Education: teaching and learning in multi-ethnic schools* (London, Unwin Hyman).

GILLBORN, D. (1995) *Racism and Anti-racism in Real Schools* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

GIROUX, H. (1992) *Border Crossings: cultural workers and the politics of education* (London, Routledge).

JAMROZIK, A., BOLAND, C. & URQUHART, R. (1995) *Social Change and Cultural Transformation in Australia* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

LANGFORD, R. (1988) *Don't Take your Love to Town* (London, Penguin).

MCINTYRE, A. (1997) Constructing an Image of a White Teacher, *Teachers College Record*, 98(4), pp. 653–677.

MINISTERIAL COUNCIL ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND YOUTH AFFAIRS (1996) *National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 1996–2002* (Canberra, AGPS).

MORGAN, S. (1987) *My Place* (Fremantle, Fremantle Arts Centre Press).

NANNUP, A., with MARSH & KINNANE, 1992, *When the Pelican Laughed* (Fremantle, Fremantle Arts Centre Press).

PETTMAN, J. (1992) *Living in the Margins: racism, sexism and feminism in Australia* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin).

PERERA, S. & PUGLIESE, J. (1997) 'Racial suicide': the re-licensing of racism in Australia, *Race and Class*, 39(2), pp. 1–19.

RIZVI, F. (1993) Children and the grammar of popular racism, in: MCCARTHY & CRICHLOW (Eds) *Race, Identity and Representation in Education*, pp. 126–139 (New York, Routledge).

RYAN, P. (1997) Another country: Non-Aboriginal Tertiary students; perception of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 25(1), pp. 18–22.

ROMAN, L. G. (1993) White is a color! White defensiveness, postmodernism, and anti-racist pedagogy, in: MCCARTHY, C. and CRICHLOW, W. (Eds) *Race, Identity and Representation in Education*, pp. 71–88 (New York, Routledge).

ROSENBERG, P. (1997) Underground Discourses: exploring whiteness in Teacher Education, in: FEIN *et al.* (Eds) *Off-White: readings on race, power and society* (New York, Routledge).

TROYNA, B. (1993) *Racism and Education* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

WARD, G. (1987) *Wandering Girl* (Broome, Western Australia, Magabala Books).

Copyright of Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education is the property of Carfax Publishing Company and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.