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Academic Classrooms and Careers Defined by Race and Gender

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Abstract: The collective classroom and career experiences of a Black woman and White male professor are examined of the last twenty years are examined. It is revealed, that despite the presence of diversity classes and increases in diversity, as regards student and faculty presence, the circumstances of the faculty in this critical examination were defined by the student, faculty, and institutional reactions to their postionalities. Predictably, the White male faculty member had the more positive experiences, while the Black woman's circumstances were more negative.

Introduction

Power relations that exist in the wider social context are played out in the teaching and learning dynamics of adult education classrooms. This paper combines and synthesized the results of two separate qualitative research studies, resulting in a new and separate effort which provides a holistic picture of the teaching and career experiences of a Black woman and White male professor.

In the first study (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998), there was a qualitative comparative case study of two courses taught by the authors in a university setting. Data sources included students' evaluations, the teachers' observations, and interviews with students, interviews with both teachers, and conversations with similarly situated faculty members. The themes of mastery, voice, authority, and positionality found in previous research were used to organize the results.

In the second study (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008) two professors examined their careers using a personal and scholarly, basing their study on journal entries, notes from formal mentoring committee meetings, personal dialogues, feedback from joint presentations, email correspondence, and time spent individually and jointly researching and writing publications on race, gender, and power in the academy. For the second study, cooperative inquiry (Reason, 1994) directed the narrative dialogue and retrospective, as the participants are active members of the academic community being discussed and they engaged in analysis and participation in each other's narrative. In this study, the Black woman's work emerges as a *testimonio* (Beverley, 1993); the White male's role and perspective was that of an ally and, as is necessary for a testimonio, he was a witness (Beverley, 1993).

In the merging and synthesis of the two studies, a separate and more holistic picture emerges of how the classroom and career experiences of two professors of adult education has affected their career behaviors and career perspectives. The findings from the current study being presented here were augmented by an ongoing dialogue between the Black woman professor and the White male professor.

Review of the Literature

Nearly all discussions of teaching in adult education simply avoid the question of whether adult education classrooms are the real world (Knowles 1980). Such a script presents the domain of ivory towers where all students are equal and all teachers are unbiased. We are presented with the unspoken assumption that the activity of teaching and learning must happen in a parallel

universe to the real world because the power relationships that are omnipresent in the social and organizational settings of everyday life have been obliterated. By stripping learners and teachers of their place in the hierarchies of social life, this view assumes that we stage adult education where the politics of everyday life do not operate or matter. This view asks us to see teachers and learners as generic entities, unencumbered by the hierarchies that structure our social relationships.

Are adult education classes the real world? Another answer to this question is that adult education is not exactly the real world and this is precisely what contributes to its effectiveness. The idea of the teacher as a facilitator is a hallmark of adult education (Apps 1991; Brookfield, 1995; Knowles, 1992). This central principle charges adult educators to go beyond the role that the teacher takes in traditional classroom settings and stipulates the need to treat adults as equals in the classroom. Yet, it is clear that facilitation does not occur on a neutral stage, but in the real world of hierarchical power relations among all adults, including teachers and learners. When adults, learners and teachers, enter classrooms they bring with them their positions in the hierarchies that order the world, including those based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and disability. Because the social context is duplicated in the microcosm of the classroom (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero 1996; Tisdell, 1993), enacting the facilitation role will reproduce the power structures that privilege some, silence some, and deny the existence of others (hooks, 1994; Maher & Tetreault, 1994). If all learners are to thrive, adult educators must go beyond the facilitator's role to directly negotiate the power dynamics in the classroom. Some theorists have recognized these issues (Brookfield, 1995; Tisdell 1995), and others have begun to call for reconstructing the image of the adult educator as facilitator (Boud & Miller, 1996; Johnson-Bailey & Alfred; 2006; Shor 1996).

The literature shows that common themes in academic lives of Black women professors is lack of respect and under-respect (Turner, 2002), which are sometimes manifested as student resistance, stereotyping, a questioning of credentials, and suspicions of research on "otherness." In contrast, the major theme for White male professors is a sense of being valued and of being a member of "the club" and the benefits of privilege of being part of the norm group of White males whose numbers dominate the academy (McIntosh, 1995; Smith, 1999; Vargas, 1999). Black faculty report psychological stress not experienced by White faculty (Thompson & Dey, 1998; Turner, 2002), including blatant disrespect; Myers, 2002; Rakow, 2000; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). Faculty of color also report that positional power does not lessen their negative experiences (Thompson & Louque, 2005). Again in contrast, a search of the literature did not reveal empirical or anecdotal accounts of negative existences of White males in the academy, but overall the literature casts the collective experiences of White males in the academy as typically ideal and or privileged, in that they represent the majority of the academic elite and academic leaders (Harlow, 2003; Menges & Exum, 1983; Ronstein, Rothblum, & Solomon, 1993).

Conceptual Frame and Methods

Critical race theory is the frame this study that combines and synthesizes the two earlier studies. Race is centered in the all phases: research, analysis, and discussion, with an awareness of and resistance to how racism drives our society (Bell, 1992; Du Bois, 1903/1953; hooks, 1989; Outlaw, 1983; Williams, 1991; Wing, 1997). Black feminist thought has been particularly important to the Black woman researcher in this study, "…a body of knowledge which asserts that the daily living of Black women in a society that is racist and sexist has produced a collective

consciousness that resists being defined as 'less than,' resists being stereotyped as undesirable, and seeks to define and empower its members by interpreting existence as a triumph," (Johnson-Bailey, 2001, p. 98).

This qualitative case study used tradition data collection (Merriam, 2000): document analysis, journal excerpts, notes from mentoring committee meetings, classroom evaluations; interviews, with students and conversations between the two case participants. The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method (Patton, 2001). The researchers used cooperative inquiry (Reason, 1994) to direct the narrative dialogue and retrospective, as we are active members of the academic community that we are discussing, and because we are engaging in analysis and participation in each other's narrative.

Findings and Conclusions

There many complex ways in which power relations based on race, class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation played out across all four themes and how these dynamics directly influenced the teaching and learning processes. The positionality of the teachers and learners, in particular the racial category of whiteness, emerged as a key power relationship mediating classroom dynamics. We suggest that the facilitation model of teaching does not account well for these dynamics and that further efforts are needed to better understand how societal power relations affect teaching and learning efforts and what responses adult educators can make to negotiate these issues.

The depiction of the Black woman and White male professor's collective forty years in academia reveals that White men and Black women are regarded and treated differently by colleagues and students. Manifestations of this disparate treatment are evident primarily in classroom and faculty interactions. An examination of: the professors' relationships with people and with their institution reveals that overall, the Black woman is relegated to a second class existence that flows along a continuum of hostility, isolation, and under-respect, while the White man lives an ideal academic life as a respected scholar who disseminates knowledge, understands complexity, and embodies objectivity.

These two faculty members' varied academic experiences illuminate common issues and dilemmas regarding how race/gender can affect one's existence in academia.
As their academic lives are different, so are the themes that loom large in their academic lives. For the Black woman, a major sub-theme for relationships with colleagues and students is lack of respect and under-respect (Turner, 2002), which are sometimes manifested as student resistance, stereotyping, a questioning of credentials, and suspicions of research on "otherness." In contrast, the major sub-theme that runs through the White male's relationships with colleagues and students is a sense of being valued and of being a member of "the club."

A second major theme that is evident is the role of authority or positional power. The Black woman's journal entries relate how her positional power often fails to make a difference in her dealings with others. While the White male's data shows an assumption of positional power was accorded to him, even when he was functioning in a where he did not have authority.

Both understanding the institutional climate and being able to function within it are seen as important keys to job success (Alfred, 2001) and these faculty members' relationships with their institution is another major category in this research examined in the findings. How well do you fit in? What is your place and connection to the institution? Are you recognized as belonging? The ultimate connection of faculty to the institution is the achievement of tenure and

promotion. And so the circumstances and careers of the Black woman and White male faculty member are examined in relation to their professional experiences.

In comparing and synthesizing data from both studies, and in conducting an ongoing dialogue between the participants, it is revealed in this summative third study that the collective classroom and career experiences of the two participants has had a profound affect: the participants have separate ideas of their place and importance in academia (hooks, 1989), despite their deceptively similar positions as professors and their apparent career successes. The Black woman has been shaped more by battle fatigue (Smith, 1999) and can be characterized as more cautious and pessimistic in her association with her colleagues, students, and institution, viewing her future as bound by a glass ceiling and a continued lack of acceptance (Ronstein, Rothblum, & Solomon, 1993). The ongoing theme in her academic career can be summed up as, *Seeing the Glass as Half Empty*. While the White male is more optimistic about his continued success and place in the academy and the ongoing theme for his academic career can be summed up as, *Seeing the Glass as Half Full*, with this future being driven more by the glass escalator (Budig, 2002; Williams, 1992).

Implications for Adult Education Theory and Practice

This study showed the many complex ways in which the power relations in the larger society not only play out in adult education classrooms, directly influencing the teaching and learning process, but revealed the cumulative affect on the lives and careers of professors. It was noted that students are very conscious of how the classroom is organized around power relationships, monitoring teachers' behaviors and exchanges with other students. The adult education classroom was not seen as a neutral educational site referred to in the literature. Instead the classroom is a duplication of the existing societal relations of power replete with hierarchies and privileges conferred along lines of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and other status markers. It was further noted that the teachers' perspectives were impaired by their own viewpoint, with them practicing cultural therapy (Banks 1994) by examining and discussing their own cultural assumptions and by providing an analysis of what was occurring in the classroom. This would suggest that positionality is a critical lens for interpreting adult education classroom and professional experiences. The facilitation model does not account for the many power dynamics in these classrooms. We suggest further efforts are needed to better understand how societal power relations affect teaching, learning, and academic careers (behavior and perspectives).

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