

*Responsibilities*  
*Relationships*  
*Respect*

**within the context of an  
undergraduate Teacher Education  
unit:**

*Education for Social  
Justice*

## *My explicit aims:*

to work with teacher education students  
(most of whom are white) to develop an  
explicitly **anti-racist consciousness**

One way of addressing this is through  
the model of the ‘**white ally**’ (Tatum,  
1994)<sup>1</sup>, a concept that is inextricably tied  
to, not only with the notion of “**working  
with, rather for the Other**” (Giroux,  
1993, 29)<sup>2</sup> but also to the injunction to  
“**work on racism for your sake, not  
their sake**” (Yamato, 1990, 423)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Tatum, D. B. (1994), Teaching White Students about Racism: The Search for White Allies and the Restoration of Hope, *Teachers College Record*, 95, pp. 462-476.

<sup>2</sup> Giroux, H. (1993), *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* Routledge, New York & London.

<sup>3</sup> Yamato, G. (1990), Something about the subject makes it hard to name, in Anzaldúa (Ed), *Making Face, Making Soul*, Aunt Lute Foundation Book, San Francisco, pp. 20-24.

## *The role of the ally*

is to speak up against systems of oppression, and to challenge other whites to do the same. Teaching about racism needs to shift from an exploration of the experiences of victims and victimizers to that of empowered people of colour and their white allies, creating the possibility of working together as partners in the establishment of a more just society (Tatum, 1994, 474).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Tatum, op. cit.

## *Inverting the gaze: why critical whiteness studies?*

Instead of studying down in the power structure and focussing upon racially oppressed groups, the gaze in critical whiteness studies is averted from

"the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served"

(Morrison 1991, 90).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Morrison, T. 1991, *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

## *Analysing whiteness*

opens a theoretical space for teachers and students to articulate how their own racial identities have been shaped within a broader racist culture and what responsibilities they might assume for living in a present in which Whites are accorded privileges and opportunities (though in complex and different ways) largely at the expense of other racial groups (Giroux 1997, 314).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Giroux, H. (1997), Re-writing the discourse of racial identity: towards a pedagogy and politics of whiteness, *Harvard Educational Review*, Cambridge, Summer, pp. 285-320.

# *'Teaching against the grain'*

<b>Building a knowledge base</b>	<b>Critical Reflection</b>	<b>Experiential learning</b>
history		Safe space
policies		Critical story-telling
key events		Discussions
demographics		Activities
dispelling myths		Simulation games

## *Disclaimer*

Changing ‘Whiteness’ is not the issue, that guilt and shame are not the end of our curriculum but, rather, our joint thoughtfulness about how our society might dismantle its historical practices of social injustice (Gillespie et al. 2002, 249).<sup>7</sup>

I have found that it is not enough to say once: "This is not about making you feel guilty. This is about understanding how being white has shaped us as well as provided us with unearned privileges, and armed with this understanding, to do something about racism" (or words to that effect).

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<sup>7</sup> Gillespie, D., Ashbaugh, L. and DeFiore, J. (2002), White Women Teaching White Women about White Privilege, Race Cognizance and Social Action: toward a pedagogical pragmatic", *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 5.3 pp. 238-253.

## *Selected responses*

This unit has challenged my views on so many issues, not only to Aboriginal and multicultural issues but my own ideals and how I treat others. Coming from a white point of view I now challenge the everyday that I live in.

I enjoyed being introduced to so many potential seeds for my own growth. This has to have been the best unit I've done to date and I'm totally inspired.

Being non-anglo I was actually very surprised to find how socialised I was to anglo norms. I look deeper than the surface now and analyse situations a bit more knowledgably.

I really loved his unit. It changed my whole outlook.

## *Resistance*

When we unleash unpopular things by making race and racism explicit parts of the curriculum, responses are often strongly emotional, and resistance, misunderstanding, frustration, anger, and feelings of inefficacy may be the outcomes (Cochran-Smith, 1995, 542).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cochran-Smith, M. (1995), Uncertain allies: understanding the boundaries of race and teaching, *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 65, No. 4, pp. 541-570.

However, despite the overwhelmingly positive written comments in recent years, numerical responses in student surveys indicate remarkably static response rates from 1995 in terms of student dis/satisfaction. With minor fluctuations the two standard questions that the university's Teaching and Learning Centre routinely asks of all courses (regarding the quality of teaching and the quality of the course) attract between 20% and 25% of responses that disagree or strongly disagree with the given statements. In other words, the rate of student satisfaction has not increased.

## *What I have learned*

Education has the potential to develop an anti-racism consciousness but if this is to happen, we must move beyond 'teaching about' and must incorporate an experiential component.

On the flip-side, education can be detrimental in developing multicultural consciousness if firstly, students see it as 'too preachy' and secondly, alternate models of being white that move beyond guilt and fear are not made available.