Unraveling the Threads of White Teachers’ Conceptions of Caring: Repositioning White Privilege

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Purpose
The purpose of this article is to examine the events that led two White elementary teachers to understand how their White racial identities influenced their teaching of children of color during a yearlong series of professional development courses.

The Article
Pennington et al. (2012) explored the salient course experiences of two White teachers using reflective interviews at the conclusion of a professional development series aligned with conceptions of critical pedagogy and multimodal communication. This coursework employed critical ethnography and racial reflexivity to reposition Whiteness and illuminate White teachers’ predisposition to care for their students in ways aligned with their own conceptions of caring.

What this Means for the Field
Teachers are in positions of power in schools. They are expected to make daily instructional and sometimes personal decisions that involve their students. There is an expectation that all teachers care about their students, and are admired for their dedication to the students they teach every day. Yet from a Critical White Studies perspective, the institutionalized nature of White teacher-student of color relationships can remain unexamined and ritualistic.

Traditional White patterns of caring involve Whites benevolently saving people of color by attempting to make them more like themselves without regard for their perspectives, providing them with assistance based on assumptions of need, or by providing silent sympathy. According to Noddings, caring involves stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference and into another’s. When we care, we consider the other’s point of view, objective needs, and expectations. Therefore, Pennington et al. (2012) propose that teacher education attend to and problematize the inherent stance of caring that White teachers bring to their classrooms in ways that open up dialogue and critique to foster Noddings and Vanelzuela’s calls for authentic caring.

Citation

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