

Volume 16 Number 2 June 2009

# Changing English

An International Journal  
of English Teaching

**CONTENTS**

<b>Editorial</b>	123
<b>Articles</b>	
Lighthouses or Follies? Academies and New Labour's Version of History <i>John Yandell</i>	125
Waiting for Rain <i>Malcolm Reed</i>	137
The Elusive Object of Transformation: English, Theory and Bernstein's Sociology of Education <i>Nick Peim</i>	149
The Making of Literature: A Continuing Conversation <i>Natalie Bellis, Graham Parr and Brenton Doecke</i>	165
Towards Engagement with the Ideas of Ian Hunter: An Argument for an Overdue Encounter <i>Roy Goddard</i>	181
Re-visioning the National Curriculum at KS3 and 4 and its Stipulation to Teach Literature 'From Different Cultures and Traditions' <i>Emma Dawson</i>	193
The Private Uses of Quiet Grandeur: A Meditation on Literary Pilgrimage <i>Judith P. Robertson and Linda A. Radford</i>	203
The (Im)possibilities of Self Representation: Exploring the Limits of Storytelling in the Digital Stories of Women and Girls <i>Chloë Brushwood Rose</i>	211
Girl Talk: Adolescent Girls Constructing Meaning in Book Groups and the Classroom <i>Sulaxana Hippisley</i>	221
Against All Odds: A Case Study of one White, Middle-class, Female Teacher Becoming an Engaged Intellectual <i>Stephanie Jones</i>	231
Periphery Non-Anglophone Scholarship in English-only Journals: Conditions of a Better Visibility <i>Tahar Labassi</i>	247
<b>Book review</b>	255
<b>Notes on contributors</b>	261
<b>Abstracts</b>	265

## **Against All Odds: A Case Study of one White, Middle-Class, Female Teacher Becoming an Engaged Intellectual**

Stephanie Jones\*

*Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education, University of Georgia, USA*

Brooke eagerly made the drive from her upstate suburban home to the urban busyness of New York City, where she would begin a Masters programme in Literacy Education. After taking out a costly loan for the one-year full-time student experience ('I didn't care how much it cost, I wanted the best,' she once said), Brooke was committed to being a good student at the elite private institution where she had been accepted. In the Fall of 2004, Brooke sat among a group of other enthusiastic students, many of them white and from suburban existences like herself. Some 'looked' white but identified as Hispanic, Jewish or Iranian. And a significantly smaller number of students 'looked' brown or black and identified as Hispanic or African American. Additionally, given the extraordinarily high tuition and residency costs of the college and the extraordinarily low amounts of student funding available, most students would be assumed to be at least 'middle-class'. And finally, all the students in Brooke's cohort identified themselves as female except for one, who identified himself as male.

The nexus of white, middle-class, female teacher education students is one of particular interest in recent scholarship across educational journals and national research conferences, which are often focused on recruiting a more diverse teaching population and preparing teachers to teach across difference (e.g. Baker and McDermott 2000; Clar and Bondy 2000; Dixson and Dingus 2007; Dozier, Johnston and Rogers 2006; Horton and Scott 2004; Ketter and Lewis 2001; McNair 2003; Rogers, Marshall and Tyson 2006; Ryan and Dixson 2006). This nexus, though saturated with complexity in lived experiences and complicated by an infinite number of other identity markers, is often represented as a monolithic group of people who experience and respond to teacher education pedagogy in similar – and often characterized as resistant – ways. This paper aims to complicate a dominant discourse around white, female, middle-class teacher education students and their presumed struggles with and resistances to critical and culturally-relevant engagements in teacher education programmes. This complication will draw from historical and contemporary accounts of the positioning of women teachers in the UK and the U.S. as well as radical feminists' theorizing and moral philosophy around powerful pedagogies grounded in anti-essentialist notions of students.

Additionally, this paper will focus on one student/teacher, who might have been perceived as representative of the mythical norm in teacher education, but narratives

---

\*Email: [sjones1@uga.edu](mailto:sjones1@uga.edu)

and classroom practices across three years demonstrate her personal negotiations around issues of race, class, gender and mainstream discourses of intelligence. Brooke is a teacher who continues to make what Deborah Hicks (2002) would call a 'moral shift' to see those different from her differently. Part of this moral shifting for Brooke has been the appropriation of post-structural and critical theoretical constructs for analyzing and reconstructing her past experiences. Her lived experiences of marginalization coupled with continuous and reflexive readings of oppressive practices in society and schooling, equip her to use these same theoretical tools to analyze and reconstruct relations in her present classroom, where she interprets the felt experiences of her students.

Through cyclical and comparative analyses of course and programme assignments, interviews, classroom observations, email correspondence and informal audio-recorded discussions with and about Brooke across three years, I will weave a nuanced story of a particular teacher education student and classroom teacher. Representing this work as a case study of one participant rather than analyses of the group of teacher education students who participated in the study aligns with my aims of this paper, which are to challenge the overgeneralization of the white, middle-class, female in education programmes and teaching in schools. Instead, I work toward a reading of an individual's negotiating complex maneuverings of identity, practice and ideology within oppressive societal structures that construct classifications and biases in ways that produce 'no true winners' (Brantlinger 2007, 260) and 'losers in the system ... likely to be too demoralized to imagine a more just world' (ibid., 262). This argument will lead to a call for a construction of a subject position that I call 'engaged intellectual' in teacher education programmes. My definition of engaged intellectual is informed by the intersection of Gramsci's traditional and organic intellectual (Gramsci 1971) but draws primarily on the work of radical feminism, moral philosophy and critical literacy.

The construction of a mythical norm representing white, middle-class, female teacher or teacher education student has a long and complex history in both the United Kingdom and the United States, that continues today. In her provocative book about the history of women as teachers, feminist scholar and literary theorist Jane Miller writes, '... wherever elementary education for all has been proposed and implemented, this has entailed the massive recruitment of women as teachers, a move that has invariably been fraught with contradiction and subjected to an odd assortment of rationales' (1996, 35). Some of the contradictions Miller presents include issues directly related to class and gender: women gaining some social status, but through the very work that is considered feminine in nature and therefore not worthy of men; women gaining some economic independence, but consistently paid well below male counterparts with similar educational experience; and women gaining some opportunity for class mobility, but positioned awkwardly as they teach children who either represent their own lower class histories and/or children from more privileged classes with whom teachers may find little in common:

Yet their education, training and work in schools usually involved them in mediating a world which was reluctant to accept teachers as bona fide members of the middle class, while requiring them to transmit middle-class culture to children from the poorest families. And even their own access to reading and to other aspects of middle-class culture was constrained by the meager character of what was offered by most forms of teacher training. The sense of cultural and class incongruity, and their own uneasy relation to that, was often felt by teachers to be a serious problem ...' (Miller 1996, 31)

Miller articulates a class-specific conundrum here, where teachers experiencing class mobility through the work of teaching might be considered somewhat middle-class but are then faced with their own limited resources for drawing from and transmitting middle-class cultural norms to the children they are teaching.

In addition to women teachers' assumed resources and abilities to transmit class-specific values, beliefs and practices, they are also assumed to embody an idealistic version of middle-class parenting in order to do so – something that has informed progressive pedagogies for decades (e.g. Walkerdine 1990). This expectation runs counter to UK and U.S. history, when female teachers were not expected (or even permitted in many cases) to bear children of their own. In contemporary times, teacher education students and many female teachers continue to find this expectation of class-specific parenting practices in (particularly early childhood) classrooms contradictory in nature as many have not yet, or may not plan to, have children.

In contemporary times debates around the feminisation of teaching in the U.S. and UK (Apple 1985; Drudy 2007) and the whitening of the teaching force (Epstein 2005) are particularly salient themes in teacher education and policy. These dominant concerns, however are too often grounded in essentialized notions of what it means to be gendered and what it means to be raced, assuming that male teachers would automatically stand as 'male role models' of a particular kind (Drudy 2007) and that teachers of colour would be predisposed to engage in critical and culturally relevant pedagogies in their classrooms. Within this nexus of class, race and gender, the specific focus on race has taken front stage in contemporary educational research and in practice.

Particularly since racial integration in U.S. public schools was mandated in the 1960s and the thrust of critical and culturally relevant pedagogy in the 1980s through to the present day, the construct of whiteness and teaching and learning across racial divides has come into powerful play in teacher education literature (Duesterberg 1999; Ellsworth 1989; Jones and Blendinger 1994; Ketter and Lewis 2001; McIntosh 1990). One important part of this shift towards a racialized focus on students and teachers is the overwhelming majority of white teachers in the United States (82.7% of 6.2 million in 2004) compared to their African American (8.4%), Hispanic (5.5%), Asian (2.9%), and American Indian and Alaska Native (0.5%) counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau 2005). In essence, it seems, that while historic UK considered the lower class status of incoming teachers its most pressing problem, 'A constant complaint from those who taught in these [first British teacher training] colleges was that the girls came from backgrounds which were not middle-class, so that training entailed, above all, the instilling of ladylike ways' (Miller 1996, 43), in the contemporary U.S. a new constant complaint may be characterized as an uninterrogated White Privilege that is carried on the skins and psyches of white teacher education students (e.g. McIntosh 1990).

The call for racial and ethnic diversity in the U.S. teaching force is not all for naught, but rather seemingly built around false presumptions about what different 'kinds' of people can accomplish as educators. Like many who write about the recruiting and retention of a diverse teaching force (to include diversity within class, sexuality, ability and religion in addition to race and ethnicity), I agree that we as a field and as a society must do that. However, I may differ in my opinion about *why* that should happen. Whereas the argument is often made that *because* the U.S. student body is increasingly diverse (racially, ethnically, linguistically), we must have a teaching force that is equally diverse to better meet students' and families' needs (e.g.

Zeichner 2003). This falls into a faulty argument that a teacher who 'matches' a student along race, class, gender, ability, and religious lines would better educate the student. This same argument is shot through with the underlying assumption that the majority of the teaching force which is white, middle-class and female is predisposed to fail at educating boys, poor, working-class or affluent girls, and all students who are not white. Against this stance, that maintains essentialist and static notions of identity and identity performances, I would argue that whenever a profession or field is dominated by one particular gender, race or class of people we should be seriously concerned about why a diverse range of people has not gained access or entry into the field (a similar argument can be found in Epstein 2005). In other words, gate-keeping in the profession (and in the education grounds of the profession) seems to be a better reason to make the recruiting and retention of excellent teachers from diverse locations an imperative.

Though I believe that the teaching profession should be diversified in many ways, particularly on the grounds of access and equity, one aim of the rest of this paper is to complicate the homogeneity that is read onto the whiteness found in so many teacher education programmes. In doing so, I hope that readers will learn about, recognize and engage with their students' diverse lived experiences as one pedagogical way of entering critical and transformational discourses around education and society.

Just as one is not born a girl but instead 'girded' through the performative discourses around one (Butler 1993), a white, female, middle-class teacher education student is not 'naturally' white, female or middle-class, but those subjectivities have been constructed for and upon her through discursive practices around raced, gendered and classed normativity. Therefore, her actions within those constructed spaces position her as either conforming to or disrupting what is perceived as normal. This means that whiteness, like other identity markers, is not natural (biological) or scientific in any way, but is socially constructed through language, action, and expectations of real people in real situations (e.g. Gould 1977; Omi and Winant 1994; Winant 1994). These constructions, then, are essentially fictions and though they have real implications for living humans as social fact that impacts on the distribution of power and goods, the categorizations are not already in existence, but created – subject positions opened up and forced upon people through linguistic and embodied practices that have become normative in themselves. The discourse around the fictional 'white, middle-class, woman' teacher education student then, is founded upon fallacies of categorization and any assumptions made based on those arbitrary categories.

Whiteness, a socially constructed and imaginatively reconstructed and lived phenomenon, has narrowed and broadened in the history of the United States as more and more European immigrants entered the country (Sacks 1996). The normative signification of whiteness is much more than skin colour and 'race', as it implies a particular kind of knowledge about the world, a particular kind of economic power, and a particular kind of social status. Though there are volumes written about the marginalization of ethnic whites (Borman and Obermiller 1994; Heilman 2003; Obermiller 1999; Philliber and McCoy 1981; Purcell-Gates 1993; Sohn 2006) and the devastating effects of class marginalization on U.S. whites (Allison 1988, 2001; Halperin 1998, 2001; Hicks 2002, 2006; Jones 2006a, 2006b; Rose 1989), the normative reading of 'whiteness' continues to be one of privilege and power (McIntosh 1990).

Class, a socially constructed and imaginatively reconstructed and lived phenomenon, has also narrowed and broadened in the history of the United States. Affluent



groups of people have patterned themselves to continuously create experiences and materialities that are out of reach of lower classes, making their experiences and material possessions the most exclusive (e.g. Bourdieu 1992; Marx 1978). This exclusivity and elitism is then passed 'down' as each hierarchical level of class of people have access to more and more non-exclusive experiences and material goods. The lived realities of this phenomenon are different for everyone, as 'class', like race and gender, is taken up, performed and perceived in different ways for different people in different situations. What remains clear in a capitalistic society, however, is that some groups of people have access to material resources that assist them in leading productive and fulfilled lives, while others do not, but instead struggle to meet even the most meagre standards of living. It is the social construction of both the capitalistic structures and the discrimination based on material resources that I am writing about here.

The nexus of 'white' 'middle-class' and 'woman' comes together as a normative one in teacher education, that typically assumes historical privilege in a homogeneous (read: white) setting. To believe in this myth of the teacher education student, teacher educators must first acquiesce to normative and static categories of race, class and gender alone and then a single (normative and static) category of the nexus of these three constructs together. Second, teacher educators must ignore evidence that there is diversity in the lived experiences within the groups of students sitting in teacher education classes, regardless of race, class and gender. The resulting consequences for students and teacher educators are quite serious, entering the dangerous waters of deficit views of teacher education students and classroom practitioners.

The persistent construction of teacher education students as *lacking* in one way or another: of male rationality, of class status, of racial marginalization, paints a bleak picture for these students (as well as their professors), their futures as educators, and, given their massive representation in the teaching force – of United States education. Focusing attention on what is perceived as lacking, however, ignores students' personal histories and the discourses that have regulated their minds and bodies up to this point, positioning them as empty vessels to be filled with others' experiences in an effort to 'make' more rational, class-sensitive and race-sensitive actors in the classroom. Much of contemporary literature in critical pedagogy (Ellsworth 1989, 1997; Giroux et al. 1996; hooks 1994; Weiler 1988) and critical literacy pedagogy (Comber 1998; Comber and Simpson 2001; Dozier, Johnston, and Rogers 2006; Gee 2001) would balk at such a construction of K-12 students, and yet we (education professors and scholars) may find ourselves caught up in the very deficit discourses in our practices with education students that we challenge so passionately for their younger counterparts.

Brooke was selected as one of three focal students for this study, based on my initial perceptions of her as representative of what I call the normative nexus of the teacher education student. The other two focal students were perceived by me to be less representative of this normative nexus, with one entering my graduate course with extensive experience of critical and feminist analysis. This student was selected because of this pre-existing 'critical edge' and my assumption that her previous intellectual engagements would make her more willing and able to imagine culturally and critically responsive pedagogy with children. I am ashamed to admit that the initial assumptions I made about the students sitting in front of me in those first weeks of class coloured the lenses through which I could even imagine who they might have been in the past and who they might become as educators. Some of Brooke's early

responses to course readings, such as her open and honest declaration that she had assumed Dorothy Allison, a poor white lesbian fiction writer from the rural South, was writing about a black family (Jones 2006b), worked to confirm my assumptions about her as naive and unaware of the ways power and privilege work in classrooms, texts and society. Over time and with my self-conscious attempts at opening my mind to Brooke's meaning-making in the course and in her classroom practices, I realized I had been wrong about her personal history and what she might be able to do with children in the classroom.

Unlike the peachy-keen snapshot that a normative perspective on the nexus of white, middle-class and female teacher education student might provoke, Brooke's narratives across the three years of this study indicated a history of persistent grappling with issues around race, gender, family structures, class intelligence, and dominant ways of using language. In her final reflections on the course she took with me in the fall of 2004, Brooke wrote the following:

... I have been struggling my whole life to understand why people act differently in certain situations and why people have to acquire the dominant discourse (I always found it funny when the other children did exactly what the teachers expected them to do on their projects). When I was in elementary school I used to ask questions like 'Why has there never been a black, Latino or woman president?' No one ever answered me seriously. They just said, 'Well there could be some day.' Now at twenty-four I have finally understood why. Learning about ideology, discourse and critical literacy has helped me to see some of the barriers that society places on certain types of people.

This 'struggle' for her 'whole life' is one that reflects a critical reading of the world (Jones 2006a) that was silenced or suppressed in one way or another, so that, for instance, Brooke reflects on no one taking her tough questions around race, gender and power seriously. Brooke writes here that there are barriers 'that society places on certain types of people', but she hints in this excerpt that *she* might be one of those very people who has experienced such barriers. This hint comes in the form of her parenthetical insertion that she found it funny when people conformed to teachers' expectations, but the more substantial problem wasn't written in this assignment until later:

After learning about the term discourse I began to have answers to questions that I had been searching for and never knew the answers existed. I was able to see how I didn't fit the dominant discourse of school and I am now able to see how it kept me from being recognized as an intelligent person.

The more painful and problematic issue for Brooke, then, was the fact that she didn't believe others recognized her as an intelligent person. In numerous conversations with me during the course of the study she has referred to people laughing or rolling their eyes at the questions she would ask as a child, but she often added 'they still do', meaning that presently this kind of social response to her question-asking was continuing to position her as unintelligent. Being immersed in theoretical readings (e.g. Freire and Macedo 1994; Gee 1996; Hankins 1998; Hicks 2002; Holland and Cole 1995; Ladson-Billings 1995; Rist 2000) and discussions around those readings offered Brooke an 'intelligent-sounding' language for talking about her marginalized experiences. This new-found comfort and confidence in critical theory and pedagogy echoes bell hooks' story about her initial exposure to the work of Paulo Freire, '... I found a mentor and a guide, someone who understood that learning could be liberatory' (1994, 6).



Ideology, discourse and critical literacy are three specific concepts that Brooke points to directly in her assignment as those that may have helped to liberate her from experiences of being perceived as inferior, but 'marginalization' also played an important role in her meaning-making in the course and then in her classroom as a kindergarten teacher – something that will be taken up later in this paper.

Learning about and using theoretical constructs and language to reflect on her personal history and, more broadly, about education and society, was a pivotal experience for Brooke. This was a turning point for her, where she was able critically to reposition herself as intelligent, as someone who could read the word and the world and talk about those readings in complex ways. She wrote:

I find myself now reading the world through a critical lens. For example, I am always watching commercials, reading magazines in the grocery line, looking at books that others are reading, reading window displays, to see how people and cultures are displayed. I am always thinking about who is marginalized and why.

This repositioning of herself as a critical (and 'intelligent') reader of the world, along with the constructing of a more confident identity as a person and teacher, opened up an intellectual space where Brooke could engage as a researcher about a topic that was very personal (marginalizing discourse in the classroom) and also had great educational and political implications. In the culminating project for her Masters Programme, Brooke studied the shifts in discourse use by a teacher when conferring with students perceived to be more or less developed writers. She drew on scholars in the fields of teacher education, literacy education, critical theory and sociolinguistics and came to a number of important conclusions, including the always most important implication of a teacher's identity. Quoting Duffy and Hoffman (1999, 10) Brooke wrote, 'There is no one perfect method for teaching reading to all children. Teachers, policy makers, researchers and teacher educators need to recognize that the answer is not in the method but in the teacher' (Masters Action Research Project 2005). Brooke used this quote to mark the importance of attending to the power and positioning embedded in language interactions between teachers and students. She insisted that once teachers became aware of such linguistic complexities they could consciously work towards reshaping their language practices to promote student empowerment, student achievement, and, ideally, social justice in educational spaces.

Throughout her final project Brooke argued that although many teachers are unable to select particular 'curriculum' for their language classrooms, the agency of the teacher lies in her power to construct social, cultural and linguistic practices with her students. This embodied notion of the classroom teacher transcends the dividing categories set up and perpetuated by groups advocating 'phonics-based' reading instruction, 'whole language', 'critical literacy', 'Reading First', and those advocating 'Research-based Reading Instruction' and others promoting a 'Culturally-relevant pedagogy' in literacy and across the curriculum. In essence, Brooke argues that the power of the teacher is in her *being* with students in and across defining moments of who the classroom participants are and who they might become.

Brooke's intellectual pursuits in the Masters programme, combined with her personal history of having experienced academic marginalization and being perceived as different and even deficient in the past, positioned her well as she readied to re-enter the classroom after a one-year hiatus as a full-time student. Upon graduation, Brooke accepted a teaching position in Brooklyn, New York, in a community that had traditionally been working-class but was experiencing rapid gentrification, which

resulted in the decrease of working-class and poor children and an influx of more affluent children. Though class diversity was decreasing, ethnic and linguistic diversity remained a strength in the school as evidenced in an interview in the Summer of 2006, when Brooke reflected on the diversity of her classroom:

... it's just a *big* wake-up call how lucky these kids are to have such a diverse classroom 'cause I ... just completely thought everyone's experience was just like mine. The first day [the languages included] Mandarin, Portuguese, Spanish, French and then English.

Brooke's framing of linguistic diversity as asset demonstrates her reading of *difference* in a different way, something that Deborah Hicks (2002) might use as evidence of a moral shift. This moral shift wasn't only apparent in the recognition of overt differences, such as language use, but it was also apparent in Brooke's attunement to the everyday social and political dynamics within her classroom. Positioning herself as a teacher-researcher, Brooke began studying what the children were doing and saying during free-choice time and used this research to facilitate dialogue among her colleagues during faculty meetings and after-school mandated study groups. During her first year in the school Brooke documented students' representations of beliefs and assumptions around gender, class, race and literacy. Some of the student comments included:

'I need to learn how to read or I'm gonna be homeless. Homeless people can't read. My parents told me that.'

'[Homeless is] like you don't have a home and you're really poor. You know, like black people.'

'That's a girl colour! That's a boy colour!'

Brooke characterized these social learning engagements as 'silences' that weren't being addressed in the mainstream curriculum of the school and she initiated a study group around critical literacy as one potential response. The focus of this collaborative group was to share stories that highlighted the ways that power was operating in the classroom and to brainstorm possible curricular responses that would validate all children's experiences, while pushing everyone to broaden their perceptions and to challenge assumptions and stereotypes. Because of Brooke's recent graduation from a programme where critical literacy played a significant role in coursework and in her self-selected research topic, Brooke's colleagues positioned her as a leader who would assist them in naming the inequities they recognized in their own classrooms. This leadership position, though carefully negotiated by Brooke in ways that were read as being collaborative by her peers, reinscribed the perception of herself as intelligent and probably fuelled her continuing interest in intellectual ideas.

During the summer following this first year back in the classroom, Brooke began to read professional books that foregrounded social and educational inequities. In an interview she enthusiastically reported that this focused intellectual pursuit around inequity and critical literacy was seeping into her 'extra' time:

... I've read Jonathan Kozol. And I'm *passionate!* This summer I read his books. And that sounds completely... nerdy. You know, like, dorky, like I should *not* read [during my free time], but to *me* it was really entertaining... it's just great to be aware... I never had thought of any of these things.

Here Brooke negotiates the contradictions of having never been recognized as intelligent and certainly not 'nerdy' or 'dorky', and her desires for and passionate pleasures in reading books that critique social structures and the status quo. This may be complicated by her own constructions of what nerdiness signified throughout elementary and high school, identity markers of *others* but certainly not of herself. In fact, Brooke represented herself as a young student who may have been read as the opposite of what nerdy or dorky meant when she told a story about walking by a poster in her elementary school that read 'Read to Succeed' and her sarcastic response to such a concept.

Months after the interview mentioned above, Brooke's position showed an even more significant change as she shifted from being *interested* in intellectual ideas and studying the ideas of her own students toward *using* intellectual ideas to move differently through her personal and professional world. Part of my understanding of this movement towards what I call 'engaged intellectual' is rooted, ironically, in the silences within Brooke's narratives – a silence that wasn't broken until the beginning of the third year of this study. Brooke foregrounded this change when she told me about herself and her colleagues trying to come to grips with the oppressive silences in their classrooms:

As a staff, how do we come together 'cause we are such a diverse staff, too. And they're saying, 'You know, we have to – before we can teach this, we have to be able to talk about our own silences...' I don't think that as teachers we do that yet. And we're asking the kids to do it.

Brooke began to act on this conviction within her study group, with other colleagues, and also with me, opening up silences in a way that helped me to learn more and more about her personal life that was always – and had always been – influencing her work as an intellectual inside the space of the classroom.

### **In her personal world**

In the beginning of the third year of this inquiry I learned that Brooke was in a long-term relationship with an African American man. She often shared stories with me that I knew were difficult for her within the experience of them and then in her reconstructing of them as well. The all too often told story about hailing a taxi in New York City was one that I heard early on, where Brooke's partner stood on the side of the street for nearly ten minutes attempting to get a cab while several passed by him and then a white male neighbour of Brooke's walked out to the street and hailed the first one to come. Another experience was of Brooke's partner walking Brooke's dog around the neighbourhood, and a white older woman approaching him to inquire about his dog-walking fees. And perhaps even harder stories to share, those of personal conflict Brooke and her partner both experienced with their families around social and political issues of an interracial relationship, as well as those within the relationship.

These personal experiences have morphed into Brooke's intellectual pursuits as she begins to move through the world experiencing the feltness of difficult moments refracted through race and gender, reflecting on those moments from an intellectually-stimulated perspective, seeing systematic oppression and making decisions about how to move forward in a way that is moral and just.

Brooke's embodied *being* in these moments with her partner and his family stimulated further pursuit of intellectual learning and reflexivity. This merging of the embodied experience, intellectual pursuit and moral responsiveness is not only apparent in Brooke's movement through her personal world but also through her professional world of the classroom. One specific scenario will be used as an example below.

### In her professional world

[Some of the children in my classroom] would even say, 'You can't be a princess because... your skin is black'. And I was like, you know, and having to like mediate that. It probably would have hit me as a big, huge shock if I hadn't taken the class you know, and just like, we've already had these conversations, so I was really ready to... um, step in and, and challenge them on those things... (Interview, September 2006)

Brooke is in a persistent position of 'mediating', or what I would call *answering* these kinds of complex practices in her kindergarten classroom. Race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, political affiliation, family structures, body image – these have all been hot topics with her kindergarteners in spaces where they have much freedom and flexibility in their uses of time (especially during choice time, writer's workshop and classroom transitions). Though Brooke has engaged in long-term inquiries with her students around each of these issues in general, I will focus on the particularities of one child's experience in her classroom as one way that Brooke works as an engaged intellectual.

Taylor, an African American girl who lives with her mother and grandmother, is a child who becomes fidgety and impatient during whole group times and focused and enthusiastically serious during independent reading and writing. Her family would probably be considered middle-class and she comes to school each day with matching outfits, carefully braided hair adorned with colourful bands or barrettes, and a pink and white lunchbox thrown across her neck and shoulders. Brooke wrote the following email to me about Taylor in early October of the 2006–2007 school year:

[I have been thinking about] some of my expectations and how I react in my frustration. It is ironic that when I began to keep track of who I was speaking to most often, it happened to be Taylor. Just being aware has helped me to reflect on my expectations in the classroom. Kids have so much energy... It is sad that kids are often labelled as bad and even punished for this energy in the classroom. (email, 21 October 2006)

Brooke makes her position as teacher-researcher evident here when she states that she began to 'keep track of' who she was speaking to most often. Her critical reflection of these practices led her to think of it as 'ironic', probably because of her hypersensitivity to power relations in the classroom and realizing that she might have been contributing to Taylor's more general marginalization in the classroom:

I keep thinking about [Taylor]. She has so many areas where she feels marginalized. Her skin colour, size, family structure, etc ... Children have made comments to her about each category and it breaks my heart ... She is such a sweetheart ... I also only lived with my mother in Kindergarten. I am wondering if I could talk about my own experiences. I didn't ever know my father and I know that a five-year-old is capable of noticing. A five-year-old notices because our mothers do everything they can to try to mask the difference. But we notice the tears, the whispers and conversations that go on. And we definitely notice when everyone around us mentions the word dad and we can't relate to the experiences. (email 18 December 2006)

Brooke answered directly to Taylor's experience of living with her mother and grandmother in spontaneous conversations about her own experience living alone with her mom and sometimes feeling different from the other children. But she also answered directly to the entire class of children about the value of all kinds of family structures by reading and discussing a series of books that featured different family structures and living arrangements, including homelessness, inter-generational families, female-only families, male-only families, adoptive families and families of one. The students were 'glued', as Brooke put it, during these kinds of textual engagements, much more so than during her presentations of lessons or activities that represented the more official curriculum.

This is only a fraction of what Brooke does in her classroom, and incredibly she is just as attuned to each individual student in her classroom as she is to Taylor, and uses her understandings of each child and all the children to develop curricula and classroom inquiries. These inquiries have focused around social class, race, school funding, family structures, social action and gender. Additionally, Brooke has pushed against structures within the school that she deems inequitable, including the enormous amount of money raised by the parent association that makes it possible for children in her school to have rich experiences not available to children even blocks away and the seeming pushing-out of working-class parents from parent association involvement as a result of the gentrification in the neighborhood. She continues to work in a cyclical way of being engaged in intellectual ideas, feeling her experiences within interactions with individuals inside and outside the classroom, and acting on the world – both in the moment and in planned ways – that seem, to her, more morally responsible.

In her critique of a male rationalist discourse dominating critical pedagogical theory, Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989, 323) argues for a 'practice grounded in the unknowable [that is] profoundly contextual (historical) and interdependent (social)'. This critique was formulated through Ellsworth's attempts at democratic dialogue, rational discourse, the levelling of power relations and the organizing for social change among students and professor in a course focused on anti-racist social action at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Though engaging in practices promoted by critical pedagogues and theorists, Ellsworth found herself and her students in pedagogical spaces where power relations in the larger society were reinscribed and where localized identity politics were in play, but were not accounted for in theory or practice. Brooke often mentioned the same problem in her kindergarten classroom: that the 'real learning' was 'spontaneous' and in response to what the children just 'threw out there' in the way of comments and actions. Similar to hooks' (1994) call for 'engaged pedagogy', where teacher and students simultaneously work towards self-actualization, Ellsworth's practice of the unknowable assumes that social, cultural, political, material and psychological histories come together to create a person who is not all one identity marker or another. Instead, complex, incoherent, even contradictory narratives of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, religion and other material and affective experiences are constructed and performed at different times, in different places and for different purposes. This feminist post-structural assumption about identities, power and narratives 'leaves no one off the hook, including critical pedagogues. We cannot act as if our membership in or alliance with an oppressed group exempts us from the need to confront the "grey areas which we all have in us" (hooks 1989, 54)' (Ellsworth 1989, 322).

Both Ellsworth and hooks provide a strong foundation upon which to build critical and socially responsible pedagogies, but neither of them directly addresses issues of



morality. Bakhtin and Hicks each contribute significantly to the moral character of living in the world and of pedagogy. Bakhtin offers the notion of *Being* as an embodied and conscious moving through the moments of our worlds where we would recognize that:

... I *am* actual and irreplaceable, and therefore *must* actualize my uniqueness. It is in relation to the whole actual unity that my unique ought arises from my unique place in *Being*. I, the one and only I, can at no moment be indifferent (stop participating)... I must act from my own unique place ... That I, from my unique place in *Being*, simply see and know another, that I do not forget him, that for me, too, he exists – that is something only I can do for him at the given moment in all of *Being*: that is the deed which makes him being more complete, the deed which is absolutely gainful and new, and which is possible only for me. (1993, 41–2)

Being, then, from a Bakhtinian perspective, is the recognition that those involved in an interaction are mutually responsible for acknowledging the unique position of the other while doing the same for the unique position of a self. To do so is to be morally responsive, to be conscious of the real effect one has on another, to be answerable. Bakhtin would argue that this answerability has no alibi in the moment of experience, though some might try to prove that there is something greater and more important than that particular moment in time. This would be considered an impoverished answerability that would try to prove an alibi in the *Being* in the moment and that this very action would ignore the self's self-activity, or sense of agency. Instead, in that moment of impoverished answerability, an actor lives by her passivity.

Brooke's journey towards positioning herself as an intellectual, engaging as an intellectual in moral response to her personal experiences, and working towards a moral understanding and responsiveness in her kindergarten classroom is a merging of Ellsworth, hooks, Bakhtin and Hicks. This merging encompasses her critically focussed intellectual pursuit and a sense of self-actualization, *Being* in the moment with real people (outside or inside the classroom) and answering in moral ways, and ignoring the fictional boundaries of personal and professional, intellectual and felt, teacher and student, life and pedagogy. Brooke once tried to write about how she engaged with issues of diversity and justice in her classroom, but found it extremely difficult to do so because of the boundaries that have been constructed around life and pedagogy:

Because inside a book are all of the things like our society, the way we think, and these lenses. So when I try to write up what I do, there are so many things like all the books I choose to read. Even having my [self-selected] professional development, the books that I read now, I'm trying to branch out I'm making myself as a teacher branch out like Maya Angelou and choosing books I would never choose before ... Instead of being mad that like, um, [some] black women are like hate me because I'm dating a black man, I'm like understanding why, you know? They're just, I'm doing that. I'm trying to write all of this up that I do as a teacher. (informal discussion, February 2007)

Brooke's insight that 'all of this' informs what she does 'as a teacher' points to her positioning as an engaged intellectual. She is moving through the world reading everything as interconnected, and making conscious decisions about how to act in the moment of experience as well as what to do to develop herself so that she may be better prepared to act differently in new moments of experience. Choosing books to read to her students, reflecting on the power of texts to perpetuate or challenge beliefs about

society, choosing novels or more typical 'professional' books to read on her own, positioning herself as researcher of the world around her and deciding how to respond – these are all things that Brooke does. And it is nearly impossible to represent them in some kind of coherent, linear fashion that might be valued or even generalized to classrooms of other educators, as Brooke has pointed out.

Brooke expanded on this all-encompassing and embodied notion of living as an engaged intellectual when she spoke about a presentation she did with the caretakers of her students around how she approaches sensitive topics and multicultural education:

... but [this kind of work] is *me*. And I feel like what happens is like spontaneous. They're (the parents are) like 'where is the diversity?' 'Is this the new social studies?' 'Where is it on your schedule?' And it's like there is no *time*. Like, it's something that there is no time for. It's like *lenses* for looking at the world and the classroom and everything that we're doing. And it just so happens that I don't *want* a time for it, I want them (students) to throw it out at me, and I want to elicit information through media, sources, dramatic play, and when it's thrown out there then we need to think about what was just said.

Brooke continues here to articulate what I mean about being an engaged intellectual as a cyclical nature of *Being* in the moments in the world, acting on the world, and stretching one's intellect to be better prepared to be in the next moments as well as planning for long-term social action. This subject location of engaged intellectual has no boundaries, and the classroom, just like personal relationships and readings of novels, is a place where embodied experiences are felt, intellectual ideas are pursued and cultivated, and where moral responsiveness is expected.

The construction of a monolithic group called 'white, middle-class, female teacher education students' works against critical literacy, radical feminism and moral philosophy. It ignores the particularities of lives and the fact that our lives offer up the resources necessary to continue to grow, change and act in new and different ways. Jane Miller warns against such homogenization when she quotes A.C. Wood, author of *A History of the University College of Nottingham 1881-1948*, and responds to the passage about teacher education students who were *different* – those who were middle-class instead of the majority of students who were working-class or poor:

There was a considerable pool of leisured, and no doubt often bored, young females who must have welcomed the opportunities the College offered, if only to get a respite from domestic chores and the vacuity of the contemporary drawing-room. (1996, 32)

Miller responds:

How painfully often that kind of disparagement served to homogenize and divert attention from the numbers of young women who sought an education. (32)

In contemporary times we find ourselves not so far removed from such disparagement and homogenization of teacher education students – constructions that work to create certain expectations and assumptions about what students can or can't do, will or won't do, have or have not experienced. Such generalized assumptions and expectations cannot assist us in working towards powerful and critical practices in the university classroom nor in the K-12 classroom. Attending to nuanced and particular narratives and the ways in which power operates through language, however, might.

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the funding of this longitudinal project through the Gender and Education Association Early Career Researcher Award, a University of Georgia Faculty Research Grant, and the Teachers College, Columbia University Diversity Fellowship. I would like to thank Jane Miller, Lesley Bartlett, Lane Clarke, Karen Spector and Lalitha Vasudevan for reading earlier drafts of this manuscript and offering their insights into the complexities of identity, power, and education.

### References

- Allison, D. 1988. *Trash*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books.
- Allison, D. 2001. A question of class. In *Growing up poor: A literary anthology*, ed. R. Coles and R. Testa, 75–86. New York: The New Press.
- Apple, M. 1985. Teaching and 'women's work': A comparative and historical ideological analysis. *Teachers College Record* 86, no. 3: 455–73.
- Baker, K., and P. McDermott. 2000. Provocative and powerful children's literature: Developing teacher knowledge and acceptance of ethnic and cultural diversity. Paper presented at the annual conference of American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Bakhtin, M. 1993. *Toward a philosophy of the act*. Trans. V. Liapunov and ed. M. Holquist and V. Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Borman, K.M., and P.J. Obermiller, ed. 1994. *From mountain to metropolis: Appalachian migrants in American cities*. Westport, CT: Bervin and Garvey.
- Bourdieu, P. 1992. *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Brantlinger, E. 2007. Returning to Marx to understand the unexpected anger among 'winners' in schooling: A critical social psychology perspective. In *Late to class: Social class and schooling in the new economy*, ed. J. Van Galen and G. Noblit, 235–68. New York: SUNY Press.
- Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. New York: Routledge.
- Clar, M.A., and E. Bondy. 2000. Building a foundation for effective teaching of poor and minority students: The Bright Futures semester. *Educators for Urban Minorities* 1, no. 2: 3–16.
- Comber, B. 1998. Critical literacy: What's it all about? *Learning Matters* 3, no. 3: 9–14.
- Comber, B., and A. Simpson, ed. 2001. *Negotiating critical literacies in classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Dixson, A., and J.E. Dingus. 2007. Tyranny of the majority: Re-enfranchisement of African-American teacher educators teaching for democracy. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 20, no. 6: 639–54.
- Dozier, C., P. Johnston, and R. Rogers. 2006. *Critical literacy critical teaching: Tools for preparing responsive teachers*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Drudy, S. 2007. Gender balance/gender bias: Teaching, teacher education and professionalism in changing international environments. Plenary presentation at the Sixth Bi-annual Gender and Education Conference, Dublin, Ireland.
- Duesterberg, L.M. 1999. Theorizing race in the context of learning to teach. *Teachers College Record* 100, no. 4: 751–75.
- Ellsworth, E. 1989. Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review* 59, no. 3: 297–324.
- Ellsworth, E. 1997. *Teaching positions: Difference, pedagogy, and the power of address*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Epstein, K.K. 2005. The whitening of the American teaching force: A problem of recruitment or a problem of racism? *Social Justice* 32, no. 3: 89–103.
- Gee, J.P. 1996. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. (2nd ed.). London: Taylor & Francis.
- Gee, J.P. 2001. Critical literacy/Socially perceptive literacy. In *Critical literacy: A collection of articles from the Australian Literacy Educators' Association*, ed. H. Fehring and P. Green, 15–39. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Giroux, H., C. Lankshear, P. McLaren, and M. Peters. 1996. *Counternarratives*. New York: Routledge.

- Gould, S.J. 1977. *Ever since Darwin: Reflections in natural history*. New York: Norton.
- Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from the prison notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Halperin, R. 1998. *Practicing community: Class culture and power in an urban neighborhood*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Halperin, R. 2001. *The teacup ministries: Subtle boundaries of class*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Hankins, K.H. 1998. Cacophony to symphony: Memoirs in teacher research. *Harvard Educational Review* 68: 80–95.
- Heilman, E. 2003. Hoosiers, hicks, and hayseeds: The controversial place of marginalized ethnic Whites in multicultural education. *Equity and Excellence in Education* 37, no. 1: 67–79.
- Hicks, D. 2000. Self and other in Bakhtin's early philosophical essays: Prelude to a theory of prose consciousness. *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 7, no. 3: 227–42.
- Hicks, D. 2002. *Reading lives: Working-class children and literacy learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hicks, D. 2006. Class readings: Story and discourse among girls in working-poor America. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 36: 212–29.
- Holland, D., and M. Cole. 1995. Between discourse and schema: Reformulating a cultural-historical approach to culture and mind. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 26, no. 4: 475–89.
- hooks, b. 1989. The politics of radical Black subjectivity. *Zeta Magazine* April: 52–5.
- hooks, b. 1994. *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Horton, J., and D. Scott. 2004. White students' voices in multicultural teacher education preparation. *Multicultural Education* 11, no. 4: 12–6.
- Jones, L.T., and J. Blendinger. 1994. New beginnings: Preparing future teachers to work with diverse families. *Action in Teacher Education* 16, no. 3: 79–86.
- Jones, S. 2006a. *Girls, social class, and literacy: What teachers can do to make a difference*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Jones, S. 2006b. Lessons from Dorothy Allison: Teacher education, social class and critical literacy. *Changing English* 13, no. 3: 293–305.
- Ketter, J., and C. Lewis. 2001. Already reading contexts: Multicultural literature in a predominantly white rural community. *Theory Into Practice* 40, no. 3: 175–83.
- Ladson-Billings, G. 1995. Towards a culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal* 32, no. 3: 465–91.
- McIntosh, P. 1990. White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Independent School* 49, no. 2: 31–6.
- McNair, J.C. 2003. 'But the Five Chinese Brothers is one of my favorite books!': Conducting sociopolitical critiques of children's literature with preservice teachers. *Journal of Children's Literature* 29, no. 1: 46–54.
- Miller, J. 1996. *School for women*. London: Virago.
- Obermiller, P. 1999. Paving the way. In *Backtalk from Appalachia: Confronting stereotypes*, ed. D.B. Billings, G. Norman, and K. Ledford, 251–66. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.
- Omi, M., and H. Winant. 1994. *Racial formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd Ed. New York: Routledge.
- Philliber, W., and C. McCoy. 1981. *The invisible minority: Urban Appalachians*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Purcell-Gates, V. 1993. I ain't never read my own words before. *Journal of Reading* 37, no. 3: 210–19.
- Rist, R. 2000. HER Classic: Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. *Harvard Educational Review* 70, no. 3: 257–301.
- Rogers, T., E. Marshall, and C.A. Tyson. 2006. Dialogic narratives of literacy, teaching, and schooling: Preparing literacy teachers for diverse settings. *Reading Research Quarterly* 41, no. 2: 202–24.
- Rose, M. 1989. *Lives on the boundary: A moving account of the struggles and achievements of America's Educational underclass*. New York: Penguin.
- Ryan, C., and A. Dixon. 2006. Rethinking pedagogy to re-center race: Some reflections. *Language Arts* 84, no. 2: 175–83.

- Sacks, K.B. 1996. How did Jews become White folks? In *Race*, ed. S. Gregory and R. Sanjek, 78-102. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Sohn, K.K. 2006. *Whistlin' and crowin' women of Appalachia: Literacy practices since college*. Springfield, IL: Southern Illinois University Press Carbondale.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2005. Facts for features. [http://www.census.gov/PressRelease/www/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/001737.html](http://www.census.gov/PressRelease/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/001737.html)
- Walkerdine, V. 1990. *Schoolgirl Fictions*. London: Virago.
- Weiler, K. 1988. *Women teaching for change: Gender, class & power*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc.
- Winant, H. 1994. *Racial conditions: Politics, theory, comparisons*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Zeichner, K. 2003. The adequacies and inadequacies of three current strategies to recruit, prepare, and retain the best teachers for all students. *Teachers College Record* 105, no. 3: 490-519.