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# The Fight in My Classroom

## A Story of Intersectionality in Practitioner Research

Zachary A. Casey

### Introduction

I begin this writing with the aim of recounting and theorizing the worst experience I have ever had in a classroom. As a teacher educator, I often use examples from my own experiences in classrooms to help illustrate a point or clarify an example for my current pre-service and in-service teachers. I position my work here as practitioner research, particularly as a form of teacher self-study (Dinkleman, 2003; Loughran, 2007). This particular story comes from the semester I spent student teaching at a high school in a suburb of Phoenix, Arizona. Prairie Point High School (PPHS) (all names appearing here have been changed) had around 2,000 students in grades 9-12. It was located in a middle- to upper-middle-class neighborhood and at that time had a reputation for high achieving students and poor performing sports teams. The course I was teaching was eleventh-grade American history.

### The Fight

On a Thursday, two weeks after spring break, I was lecturing as my students feverishly copied notes from the overhead projector. I was going over and elaborating on the section review I assigned at the end of each unit of study, which also served as test preparation for the district-mandated, district-wide final exam. This particular unit covered the years immediately following World War II, including the second Truman presidency as well as both of Eisenhower's terms. While class normally consisted of students working in small groups, analyzing historical documents, and investigating their own historical questions, this particular class was one of the rare days in which the instruction was teacher-based. As I was discussing the Democratic convention of 1948, the historic moment when Strom Thurman and the Dixiecrats stormed out, I asked a question hoping to involve my students in the discussion. It is worth noting that the particular incident I am about to describe happened in my sixth-period course. I had taught the exact same lesson and asked the exact same question in each of my other classes earlier in the day, and expected nothing to the contrary for the fifth and final course I would be teaching that afternoon. I asked the question, "So, why do you think the Southern conservatives stormed out of the convention?" Much like my other classes that day, most students continued writing down the notes from the overhead as others looked to me without raising their hands or offering an answer. I pushed on, asking, "Well, think about it. Who was the first Republican president?"

The lone response came from the only African American in the room, Anthony. He was around six-feet, four-inches tall, very muscularly built and wearing nice, but very baggy clothing. "John Lincoln," he said with a slight upward inflection that made his answer to my question almost into

a question itself. I smiled, and paused for a moment so that I did not let out a laugh. My exact response was, "Well, maybe his boys called him John, but I think most people knew him as Abe or Abraham Lincoln." At this, most of the class laughed, including Anthony who smiled broadly. As I began to walk around to the other side of the room, away from Anthony, a white student named Daniel mumbled something under his breath that went completely unnoticed by his now smiling student teacher. The class continued as normal, with my lecturing on the notes from the overhead with a few more pauses for student interaction. To me, everything was proceeding quite normally in my final and favorite class of the day. On days when I did a lot of talking I would try to reward the students for putting up with me. As we were finishing up our unit on the post-War period, I put on an old episode of Disney's *Davy Crocket* from 1956 for the last ten minutes of class as I organized my desk and began the errands I completed at the end of each school day.

Quite suddenly, with only about two minutes left in the class period, I heard the scraping of desks and two small screams. The screams had come from the two female students sitting closest to Daniel's desk. What I saw when I looked up was the towering figure of Anthony now being held back by two male students, both white, and Daniel on the floor with blood dripping from his face as he clutched his nose. My mentor teacher, Mr. Mesa, had only just come back into the room a few minutes beforehand and had his back turned to the situation when it happened as he erased the dry erase board. Mr. Mesa acted quickly as he took Anthony by the arm and escorted him out of the room. The longest minute I have ever experienced passed and the bell rang signaling the end of the class period. I grabbed the box of Kleenex and handed it to Daniel who did what he could to clean himself off. "Help me find my tooth," he said through his hand now holding tissue up to his bleeding nose. "Your what?" I asked, assuming I must have misheard him. "My tooth," he said and this time he showed me his teeth and the space where one of his front bottom teeth had been knocked out. The lights were still off from the video the class had been watching, so I moved away to turn them on and on my way back to the part of the room where Daniel sat, I saw his tooth five feet away from where he was now sitting up on the floor.

Handing someone their own bloody tooth that has been knocked out only moments previously was not a part of my teacher preparation. I instructed Daniel to get up and that we needed to head down to the office. I held out a hand to help him up, which he accepted and steadied himself. As we were making our way down the hall towards the main building and the office, he asked if he could go into the bathroom to clean himself up. I told him he could and stood in the hall waiting for him. I remember the only thing I was thinking about was what happened to make Anthony punch Daniel; both were normally very friendly and engaged students. Once Daniel emerged from the bathroom he was talking on his cell phone. "We gotta' take care of something after school, man," he was saying. "I gotta' go," he hung up as he entered back into the hall. "It's probably best if you don't call anyone else or make any threats," I said. "Whatever, Casey," he said. "That nigger is going to get it after school." I stopped mid-stride, and I'm sure my mouth was hanging open. I quickly tried to think if I had ever heard *that word* said with such maliciousness in real life. The truth is I hadn't and still to this day I have never heard someone say that word with such malevolence as that 17-year-old young man said it.

"Daniel, I'm going to have to tell the vice principal what you just said!" I finally managed to say. "Whatever, man, you do what you gotta' do and I'll do what I gotta' do." The rest of the walk

was spent in silence, my heart and mind racing thinking about what had just transpired. How could something like this happen at a school like PPHS? This was the kind of thing that someone would see on TV shows about high school, not in an actual classroom in suburban Arizona! I ordered Daniel, and ordered is the most appropriate word here, to sit in a chair outside the vice principal's office, and knocked on the door. Anthony sat across from the vice principal, tears in his eyes. "Daniel is outside, and I need to speak with you privately for a moment," I said to the vice principal. We left Anthony in the room and went into an office that was empty at the moment, which belonged to the athletic director. I explained what Daniel had said on the walk to the office. The vice principal proceeded to fill me in on Anthony's side of the story. I learned that as I had moved away from the back of the room, while the class was still laughing about Anthony's minor mistake, Daniel had said, "dumb shit," under his breath. Of course, this went unnoticed by almost the entire class with the exception of the five or so students sitting immediately around Daniel, one of whom was Anthony. As I was organizing my desk and Mr. Mesa cleaned the dry erase board, Anthony went to confront Daniel.

"So, you gonna' apologize or what?" Anthony asked Daniel. "No, I'm not going to apologize, you fucking nigger!" replied Daniel. Anthony then swung at the five-foot, six-inch white student who had just insulted him. Daniel was thrown backwards so quickly that he hit his mouth on the desk behind him. This desk is what had knocked out Daniel's tooth that I had found on the floor. Anthony had apparently been crying for the entire walk to the office and as he had told the story to the vice principal. The last thing the vice principal told me was that racial slurs had been an issue several years ago at the school and that Daniel would receive the same punishment as Anthony, assuming he told the truth when it was his turn to meet with the vice principal. Anthony told me some three weeks later that Daniel was the first person of any race to ever call him "the n-word." He told me that his mom had told him about that word when he was really little and that it was bad. He listened to rap artists who used the word a lot, but as Anthony put it, "It's way different when someone says it to you *like that*."

This story has informed my teaching every day since. The next day, in sixth period, everyone seemed especially somber. The two empty chairs in the back sat as a reminder of what had taken place the day before. The bodies that had filled those chairs were and are far more complex than my simple story has implied thus far. It would be easy to view this incident as a racist white student and a student of color who responded with aggression. However, like so many other things, the two main characters in this story are complex persons with histories that inform the ways in which they interact and navigate their experiences in schools. As I tried to make sense of the experience, and in the subsequent years that have seen me move to work in the university classroom, I have never been able to think about this story without thinking about class, along with race. I offer only my own sense making, as any true foray into practitioner inquiry should.

### **Race Making in the Classroom**

In the beginning, immediately after it happened and the first few times I told the story, all I could see was race, racism, white supremacy. Race, however, is such a varied and veiled subject that it becomes necessary to be specific and outline what exactly is meant by the term *race*. In my first year of graduate work, I felt I finally developed a theoretical language to talk about race. That year I read Amanda Lewis (2003), who discusses race as she says, "Race is not something we are

To finally understand race as a social construct meant that I had to look to social phenomena and institutions to uncover where race comes from and how it is shaped.

born with (in that it is not a genetic or biological fact) but something that is mapped onto us from the first moments of life (with the listing of race on the birth certificate)” (p. 6). She goes on, “Racial identities do not automatically follow from these early external racial assignments. They take shape over time, through multiple interactions with those who are the same and with those who are different” (p. 6). Many of these interactions happen in schools. What emerged for me from these statements about what race was

a vision of something in transition, something that is not fixed but is constantly being (re)negotiated. To finally understand race as a social construct meant that I had to look to social phenomena and institutions to uncover where race comes from and how it is shaped. I came to see that it wasn’t racism alone, but race *making* that was taking place in my classroom. I now turn to an analysis of this race making and the impact it had on Anthony and the eventual fight.

In a school setting that is predominantly white, the concept of race is minimized. That is, normally where we do not see difference, questions about difference are not raised. If we see white as without race, as is evident even in the language of those racially aware enough to use the phrase “people of color,” when whites are confronted with an all-white group we do not see race. However, PPHS had a student population that was 71 percent white, 17 percent Latino, 7 percent African American, 3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent Native American<sup>1</sup>. What this breakdown means for individual classes is that in a class of 30 students, less than nine would be students of color. What’s more, there were a disproportionate number of students of color in remedial and special needs classes. Finally, in many of the advanced classes there were even fewer students of color than should be statistically represented. In sixth hour, in a class of 28 students, there were three students of color: two Latina young women, and Anthony, the one African American.

As I carried this story around with me, both into classrooms and into texts, I was struck by a concept taken from Du Bois’ (1903) work on the African American experience: double consciousness. He writes,

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (p. 7)

Seeing “one’s self through the eyes of others,” in this case, a white other, is a process I believe almost everyone goes through; how else could racism be maintained? But in a school setting with very few African American students, more specifically, in a classroom where he was the only African American person, Anthony was forced into a position where he saw himself as other and was *made* to see himself as other. The altercation with Daniel is the culminating

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed during the time of my student teaching

moment of otherness, proof that he is different, proof that he is unwelcome and does not belong. This becomes manifest in the word Daniel chose to use, the *n-word*, nigger. As Du Bois put it, “He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face” (p. 7). Anthony was cursed and spit upon and made to feel less than human. That is what was being taught in my classroom at that moment, and that is what race making looks like.

I wish to be careful to not essentialize Anthony and other African American men. That is, I do not wish to make it appear that I am using one student’s experience as synecdoche for all African American men. However, Du Bois provides a way for us to recast Anthony’s point of reference and his experience in a way that, for me at least, was hidden at the time and, in the spirit of inquiring into my practice, remains partially hidden to me now. At that point in my teaching career I had not yet learned that I had not empathized or even considered what Anthony’s perspective might have been as an African American in a classroom dominated by white faces. Of course, he spoke differently, dressed differently; he even entered the room differently. I had a habit of standing at the door and greeting each of my students as they entered. Anthony would always walk up to me, arm extended for a high-five and say, “What it do, Mr. Casey?” This difference, as subtle or explicit as I made it for my own practice, was real and deserves consideration. But what is a white teacher to do to help an African American student? Surely treating them differently is out of the question; they deserve the same respect, and thus treatment, of any other student. Perhaps, however, my comment, making light of Anthony’s error was worse because I was making a joke from an answer delivered by the only African American student in the class. While I do not believe I will ever reconcile these questions, I do believe an understanding of the complexity of race and how race plays out in classrooms is essential if we are to understand how schools reproduce race relations.

Yet we must not assume that race making is unidirectional in classrooms, or that Daniel was not just as caught up in a process of becoming as Anthony in that moment in class. In this way, Daniel’s whiteness becomes critically important to understanding his positionality and his actions that afternoon. It became essential for me not only to have a rich theoretical account of othering people of color in classrooms; I needed to better understand how whiteness figured in the space as well.

“The white problem,” as David Roediger (2007) puts it, is “the question of why and how whites reach the conclusion that their whiteness is meaningful” (p. 6). George Lipsitz (2006), in his seminal text *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, defines whiteness “as the unmarked category against which difference is constructed,” and states further, “Whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations” (p. 1). Frankenberg (1993) defines whiteness in much the same way, not solely as a racial identity but as “a location of structural advantage, of race privilege” (p. 1). She also locates whiteness as “a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society... ‘Whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (p. 1). These views of whiteness point to the complexity and power inherent in the notion of whiteness but do not account for how this standpoint of whiteness is formed.

Roediger (2007), citing Du Bois' conception of a "public and psychological wage of whiteness," posits that "the pleasures of whiteness could function as a 'wage' for white workers" (p. 12-13). This wage, however, entails a loss which is felt as a longing for an imagined past or an imagined racial other on whom white people project their fears and desires. White immigrants, for Roediger, were forced to give up something of themselves in order to become white, and that loss enables white supremacist thinking. This can be understood in considering what options were made available to poor working class Europeans who on arrival to the United States were not considered white. If these new immigrants wished to become white in the context of the US, they needed to shed their previous lives, customs, and cultures in favor of a white identity that would grant them access in a white supremacist society. Whiteness can then be understood as far more than a racial identity not only because of racial privilege, but because of the coercive nature by which white elites were able to construct and maintain a racial hierarchy that would see some be able to transition into whiteness and others remain perpetually outside.

Whiteness in contemporary theories has largely been theorized as racial privilege (McIntosh, 1989; Sleeter, 1995, 2005). Here, whiteness is seen as granting choice to those who are successfully able to move in the world as white. The choice to perceive one's self as raced or not, as well as the choice to blindly move in the world without recognizing privileges bestowed on white people solely based on their skin color are examples of such privilege. McIntosh (1989) writes about her own realization of this privilege, saying,

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a pattern of assumptions which were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turf, and I was among those who could control the turf. My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make. I could think of myself as belonging in major ways, and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. (p. 10)

White privilege manifests in classrooms as both white teachers and students, when confronted with racism and the historical legacy of white supremacy, often resist such new knowledge and cling to what Bree Picower (2009) has called "tools of Whiteness," which she defines as discursive tools that are "designed to protect and maintain dominant and stereotypical understandings of race—tools that [are] emotional, ideological, and performative" (p. 197).

Scholars such as Thandeka (2006) and Jansen (2009), however, are pushing the conversation beyond white privilege to question the extent to which whiteness is, in fact, even more complex, fluid, and varied than previously imagined. For Thandeka, a white child is "a racial victim of its own white community of parents, caretakers, and peers, who attack it because it does not yet have a white racial identity" (p. 13). Tracing both the history of European ethnic groups immigrating to the United States as well as people born to white parents within the US, her analysis highlights the extent to which whiteness is an ideal that requires a surrendering of ways of being in order to conform to white norms. White people, both historically and currently, become victims of the process of becoming white, where they are forced into a way of being that may well conflict with their innermost feelings of right and wrong, producing what Thandeka has termed "white shame." This shame stems not from wrongful acts one feels guilt or remorse

over, but rather from an internalized feeling that one has had to choose between whiteness and their own humanity.

The learned and painful feelings of white racial identity are far more complex than privilege alone, as Jansen (2009) describes in his theorization of brokenness. He defines brokenness as “the idea that in our human state we are prone to failure and incompleteness, and that as imperfect humans we constantly seek a higher order of living. Brokenness is the realization of imperfection...” (p. 269). For Jansen, much like Freire’s (2000) contention that in the act of oppressing one gives up a piece of one’s own humanity, white people are broken by a white supremacist society in which they cannot live as they know they ought to. While Jansen’s (2009) work centers on South Africa and theorizing white South Africans in the post-Apartheid era, his construction of whiteness as brokenness resonates in the United States as well. White people are broken in a system in which they are prevented from realizing their true potential as human beings due to the white supremacist systems that structure and govern their lives. It is my contention here that Daniel’s malicious language towards Anthony came not only from a side of him ensconced in hate, in white privilege and supremacy, but also from a place of brokenness masked in the racist language he used in the classroom.

### **Making Class in the Classroom**

It is also essential, however, to understand that this incident is not solely a story of race and race relations, but also one of class. My use of class here may be understood in the Marxist sociological sense, as “the kind and extent of control or lack of it which the individual has over goods or services and existing possibilities of their exploitation for the attainment of income or receipts with a given economic order” (Weber, 2001). This enters the classroom in a multitude of ways, from the ways in which students speak, the clothes they wear, what they eat for lunch, how they arrive to school; even their conception of the purpose of school ought to be considered as class based. There is also a push to understand race in terms of class, or to situate race conflict within the larger context of class conflict. William Julius Wilson (1978) made this case, saying, “Class has become more important than race in determining black access to privilege and power” (p. 2). For me this debate is theoretically engaging, but on the whole not very useful. Class and race intersect in myriad ways and positioning either outside of the other does them both a disservice as hegemonic constructs that govern our daily lives. As I developed my theoretical language around issues of class, I began to realize that I had to examine both students, Anthony and Daniel, drawing attention to their class and thus, their class differences. A more complicated story emerged.

Anthony came from a single parent household. His mother, an African American woman, spoke with me several times at the beginning of the semester about how important it was that I “stay on top of Anthony.” I remember her vividly, saying, “He’s smart enough, you just have to beat it out of him sometimes.” I treated Anthony the same as any other student, just as I had been trained to do in my teacher preparation program. Early in the semester Anthony had a bad habit of missing class. I found out it was because he lived out of district, farther away than I did and I drove 30 minutes each way to get to the suburban school every day. Because he did not have a car of his own, his mother had to drop him off, but that was difficult for the first two weeks of the new semester because she had just started a new job. I found this out when I was calling all

of my students' parents who were in danger of losing points off their final grades for absences. I was to learn later that Anthony was attending PPHS because it was a "better" school than the one he would have attended. It is worth noting that the school in his home district had a much higher percentage of students of color and had a much higher percentage of students who qualified for free and reduced lunch. Part of the law in Arizona states that, so long as there is room, students may elect to attend other schools than their home district, however, transportation to other schools is not guaranteed. The fact that Anthony did not live close to the school, and the fact that PPHS was seen as a "better" school than the one he would have attended otherwise are important to this discussion because they help to situate Anthony's classed life outside of school. While my analysis here is primarily concerned with Anthony the student, so often as teachers we forget to think of our students as actors outside the school walls, and to consider the immense amount of knowledge and experience, for better or worse, they bring with them into our classrooms.

In immediate contrast, Daniel lived close to the school and drove a Volkswagen that had several aftermarket parts to make it sound louder than it normally would. The vehicle looked like a racecar out of *The Fast and the Furious*, a film about underground street racing I was able to bond with Daniel over. He wore the same clothes as many of the students did, mostly from trendy brands of the time like Abercrombie and Fitch or American Eagle Outfitters. Daniel had spent the entire year previous to being in my class in a rehabilitation center in Utah. In his first junior year, he had often come to school high, mostly on cocaine and mushrooms. He was given the choice to go into a juvenile corrections facility or to a rehabilitation center that specialized in underage users. Daniel told me all of this one day after school, about a month before the incident. He also told me how much more seriously he was taking school now and that he really wanted to be able to go to college. His father was an executive at a local firm, and his mother was a stay-at-home mom. I spoke over the phone with his father the day after the incident. He never mentioned the altercation but merely asked that I organize a packet for Daniel so that he would not fall behind over his suspension. I met his mother when she came to pick it up. Again, she never addressed why her son had been suspended; she just thanked me for the work and walked back out to her car. I made the same packet for Anthony that I made for Daniel, though his mom did not ask for it. She never came to the school to collect it.

Class, and to use Weber's term *class situation*, is latent here in Daniel's story. As Weber (2001) put it, "Social class structure is composed of the plurality of class situations between which an interchange of individuals on a personal basis or in the course of generations is readily possible" (p. 122-123). Daniel's background and his family's financial situation provided him the opportunity to go to an out-of-state rehabilitation center rather than spending time in a correctional facility close to home. This mobility is class based, and while it was not Daniel's wealth (rather, it was his parents') that allowed him to go to the rehabilitation center, students bring their parent's class status with them to school. They also learn their class position and what it means in relation to others, to "official knowledge" in curricula, and to the adults they interact with. All of these are examples of class making.

### **How It Finally Made Sense: Intersectionality in the Classroom**

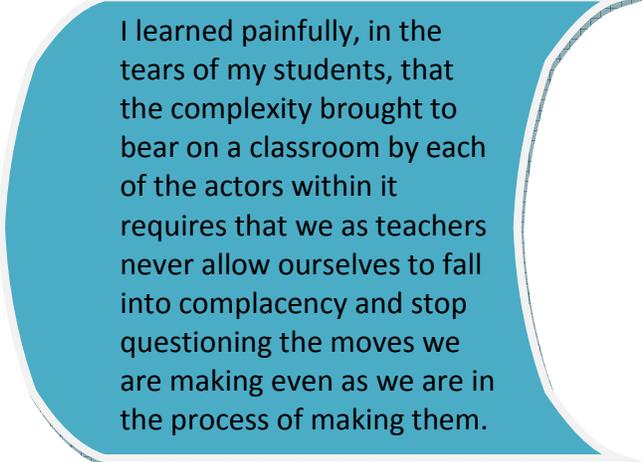
What emerges from this discussion of class and race is a case for what Crenshaw (1992) has called *intersectionality*. Crenshaw, in her work on African American women and feminism,

wrote, “African American women by virtue of our race and gender are situated within at least two systems of subordination: racism and sexism” (p. 1467-1468). I was struck by Crenshaw’s account of the subordination of African American women and in time came to think of the fight as a moment of intersection in two forms of subordination. Rather than looking at gender discrimination, I could see from the story of Anthony and Daniel that the systems of subordination at work were racism and classism. As Crenshaw clarifies her conception of intersectionality, she posits, “The dynamics of racism and sexism intersect in our lives to create experiences that are sometimes unique to us [African American women]” (p. 1468). Again, in my thinking as I substituted sexism with classism, I saw an argument forming that I believe has salience for my story. That is, elements of race and racism intersect with elements of class and classism to the point that neither can be fully separated from the other. In Patricia Hill Collins’ (1990) work on Black Feminism, she posits a need to see “distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination” (p. 222). She goes on to say that “each system *needs* the others in order to function...[this] creates a distinct theoretical stance that stimulates the rethinking of basic social science concepts” (my emphasis, p. 222). In this work, Hill Collins is making the case for an understanding not of race or class but rather how race informs class and how class informs race. Better, the two systems of oppression “need” each other, rely on each other, and exist in tandem with one another.

To illustrate this point, if we are to examine Anthony, to say only that he is African American does not at all give us the full scope of his background and lived experiences. By understanding the complexity of his character, questions arise around the concept of what about him has been shaped by his race and what has been shaped by his class? I believe this question is not necessary to answer; what is necessary is the understanding that class and race are linked indefinitely and inform one another. If we are to understand Lipsitz (2006) when he makes the case that “race is a cultural construct,” we must understand that race is not fixed and thus is informed by other elements (p. 2). Among these other elements, none figure more prominently than class and class status. Looking at Daniel, intersectionality was evident yet again. In understanding Daniel’s background and the ways in which it differs from Anthony’s, two questions emerged: (a) where does Daniel’s whiteness and his class intersect to form his positionality in this context; and (b) what animosity does Daniel actually feel towards Anthony? Of course it is possible that Daniel has a deep-seated belief in white supremacy, however, I believe that this is not the full story. Rather, Daniel enjoys an elevated class position, in that his “cultural capital” has more value at PPHS than that of Anthony. That is, of the lived experiences that both students have had in their lifetimes, the school setting rewards those of the dominant class to a greater extent (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). In this example, Daniel represents the dominant class. While Daniel resorted to a racial slur, it is my contention that what Daniel was expressing goes beyond race. Daniel was making Anthony out to be an *other*, in every possible way, not just based on race. What all of this makes clear is that in arguing for a separation of race from class we propagate, as Omi and Winant (1994) put it, “a subtly racist element in this substitution” (p. 22). That is, if we are to isolate race, we give credence to the belief that race is fixed and minimize the cultural, political, and economic realities that have formed, shaped, and will continue to reshape race.

### **Finding the Practitioner: My Role in the Fight**

The first few times, I retold this story without any acknowledgment of my own involvement. But after sharing it in a teacher education classroom with my students I found myself emphasizing my role and the moves that I made in relation to the students involved. As the authority figure in the room, and as the instructor charged with protecting the interests of my students, I failed in a meaningful way. Teaching in any institution means that one is engaged in the process of managing ideologies. Of course a teacher cannot be expected to be, and is not always



I learned painfully, in the tears of my students, that the complexity brought to bear on a classroom by each of the actors within it requires that we as teachers never allow ourselves to fall into complacency and stop questioning the moves we are making even as we are in the process of making them.

responsible for every student's thoughts in every situation, but the fact that physical violence was done unto a student is, at least in part, my responsibility. What is more, I caused the altercation by making a sarcastic remark intended to invigorate the class. As the pedagogical actor I failed and yet I succeeded in maintaining the status quo. This can be seen in the discipline that was carried out by the school: that Anthony, despite being called a horrible name, was given the same punishment as Daniel. The message sent to the majority of the class was that it is wrong to use racial slurs and equally wrong to respond with violence. Nothing is questioned or challenged along racial or class lines. Instead the incident is viewed as isolated, it is dealt with, and the class moves on. I remain in an ambiguous position about my role in the fight. I made a move to make a joke at a student's response, that student was then teased for it, harassed, and ultimately spurred to violence by a chain of events I started. I do not mean here to position myself at the center of this story, only to show that I am aware of my role and note that I am a white male, and that matters.

I must also note the impact this story has had on my own pedagogy in the teacher education classrooms in which I now work. I share this story with students often when struggles with racism and classism are brought into the class both by me in the course topics and texts we take up, and also by students seeking to make meaning from experiences they have had in their own classrooms. The implications of this story, I believe, rest not so much in rethinking my role in the events of that day and all of the things I could (and should) have done differently to prevent the fight, but rather in how that day changed the way I pay attention in classrooms. I learned painfully, in the tears of my students, that the complexity brought to bear on a classroom by each of the actors within it requires that we as teachers never allow ourselves to fall into complacency and stop questioning the moves we are making even as we are in the process of making them. This is my message to my students: you may well fail in meaningful ways in the classroom, as I did, but you must have the skills to recognize when you have failed in order to imagine other possibilities and to grow from such an experience. We must remember that every one of our students brings their entire lived reality into the classroom with them each and every day. This means we have an obligation as teachers to take the raced, classed, and gendered lives of our students into consideration not only in our curricular planning but in every interaction we have with students, both inside and out of the classroom. The events of that day, and my own journey of making sense of it both theoretically and personally, are a part of who I am in every classroom

I enter. It is essential that we as teacher educators enable our students to practice reflexivity, as we cannot hope for reflexive teachers without valuing that which our students have to reflect on. Modeling such an exercise, as I strive for in my retelling of this story in classrooms, becomes a crucial task for all teacher educators committed to enabling their students to work actively against structures of oppression in both schools and classrooms.

### **Practitioner Research on Research: Concluding Thoughts**

In this retelling and theorizing I wanted to not only capture the story of the fight in my classroom, but also the story of my sense making and how I came to develop a theoretical language that could account for all of the complexity of those few moments. I have made the case that we cannot fully separate race from class, nor class from race, but rather that the two are intersectional, informing one another in myriad settings for countless peoples and bodies. With this understanding of intersectionality I was able to begin to ask new questions in my work and research on the process of challenging oppression and domination in classrooms. I am of course unfinished in this pursuit, but the story of the fight in my classroom continues to hold a place in the back of my mind in every conversation I have about classrooms, race, and class. I am cautious to remember that, as Haney Lopez (1996) warns us, “We continue to revitalize race at every moment, as a society, and more [pertinently] as individuals” (p. 190). I am constantly re-centering my whiteness as I attempt to make sense of my experience as a racialized white actor in a white supremacist society. I do believe that wanting to know more about the fight in my classroom, not being content with a simple story of racist violence, has pushed me to become a better student of whiteness and white supremacy. With an understanding of intersectionality and the ways in which various forms of oppression inform one another, we can never go about working in ways that pretend this is not the case, that race can ever be severed completely from class, to be studied in its entirety and inform our practice for anti-racist action. While I wish this were the case, I hope my work here has helped to show that the complexity of intersectionality as an interpretive tool can give us as researchers newfound insights into processes of oppression and into our own practice.

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