

Canadian society such as CEOs of large corporation, judges, members of parliament and place these descriptors on one of the layers of the flower. Then students fill in their own social identity on another layer. Again, depending on the class, we may discuss how their identities are similar and different from those who hold power and what are the implications of these similarities and differences. Another question might be how do various aspects of their identity intersect to either reinforce or undercut whatever privilege might be accorded to them within Canadian society. The power flower then becomes the basis for the teacher candidates to write a brief personal description of their own social identities. Ideally, this is not just a list based on various categories of identity but a description of how their perceived identities in these categories affected the teacher candidates and how they grappled with these impacts, including any complex or contradictory aspects of how their social identities are enacted.

An Indo-Canadian man wrote about how the two most apparent and pressing aspects of his identity were gender and race. While he acknowledged that gender gave him privilege especially since he was a heterosexual man “living in a predominantly heteronormative and patriarchal society,” he felt that gender was not a primary identity factor for him because he had never ascribed to the traits usually connected to “hyper-masculinity.” He went on to describe why race was so integral to his social identity:

“Being an Indo-Canadian is critical to my social identity only because it's what I am primarily seen as and judged upon. I cherish and value my Indian heritage and make a concerted effort to speak the language and maintain my ability to read and write Punjabi. However, it's not what I want to be perceived as. By that I mean I don't want to be reduced to the colour of my skin and the country where my family originated. I hear statements that I am “not looking brown,” “not listening to brown music,” you're whitewashed” and you are “too brown” or not “brown enough.” These statements are troublesome because I'm being told by a third party that I meet, exceed or fail to fulfill the requirements of a societal expectation based solely on my race. And this goes beyond other people's stereotypes. Even people in my family

tell me that I should do more/less of “X” because I am Indian; what does that even mean?”

This teacher candidate's insistence on the importance of his heritage to his sense of identity but his resentment of the expectations of him by friends and family members based on this heritage are very reminiscent of the young people in Dan Yon's study. The difference is perhaps that as an adult this teacher candidate can hold this complexity without turning away from his heritage. In his final paper, a critical analysis of his teaching practicum, this teacher candidate talked about his connection with a South Asian male student who was clearly capable but was not doing well at school, in part because of his drug use. The teacher candidate talks about how this boy reminded him of himself at that age. He also discusses his attempts to counteract the negative stereotypes other teachers had of this student and near the end of the teaching practicum tries to give him advice, “without telling him what to think or do” about how his attitude to school would ultimately be a disservice to his own future. The teacher candidate referred to his exchange with his student as “probably the biggest teaching moment of my practicum.”

Not surprisingly, many of the teacher candidates in this class who were racialized mentioned race as an important factor in their social identities. For example, a Black male teacher candidate in describing how he tries to counter racist stereotypes of Black people wrote:

“I may say something like ‘I'm black but I don't have a record’ or ‘I'm a post-secondary graduate.’ I would include anything atypical of the black stereotype. It has not occurred to me that I may have been perpetuating the negative stereotypes that I have been trying to avoid...Quite unfortunately, race matters because society has made it matter.”

This teacher candidate also commented in class on how he always strives to speak well (English and Politics were his two teaching subjects), to be gentle and to dress in a “non black” way. He also identified that he comes from a single parent family and grew up in a poor neighbourhood where there was a lot of crime. He was very engaged by our work on stereotype threat through the reading of sections from Claude Steele's *Whistling Vivaldi*. He was particularly struck by the story that Steele tells

that provides the title for his book on stereotype threat [6]. An African American man tells the story about his experience as a psychology graduate student at the University of Chicago. He becomes aware that his very presence is seen as threatening by the pedestrians in the upscale neighbourhood of the campus. Not wanting to instill fear, he decides to whistle and chooses popular tunes from the Beatles and Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. He immediately notices the difference in the demeanour of other pedestrians. I think that my teacher candidate shared this African American man's desire to distinguish himself from the stereotypes that Canadians might have of a Black man and was delighted to see his own desires around counteracting negative stereotypes of Black men addressed in a scholarly text. It is interesting to me that in his analysis of his practicum this teacher candidate discusses a Black boy who seems to feel a connection to him and even mentions to another teacher that this Black teacher candidate is the only teacher who "gets him." Other teachers saw the Black student as unruly and not particularly interested in school. The teacher candidate goes on to say:

"The only similarities that we shared were that I was a man, and I was Black. How self-aware must he be to identify with me based on my race? Was that why he thought I understood him? I know nothing about him besides the teacher gossip and what little he shared with me. And yet, he was the most receptive with me of all his teachers. I'm apprehensive to say that it is due to our shared racial identity because that was not the same experience for myself when I was a student and had a Black teacher."

The teacher candidate is not sure what to make of this student's sense of connection with him. The teacher candidate's reluctance to believe that this is based on a shared racial identity is influenced by his own experience with a Black teacher but I believe also by his own discomfort with racial stereotypes and his felt need to distance himself from these stereotypes. Despite the fact that he shared other aspects of identity with this boy, who is being raised by a hard-working single mother, the teacher candidate continues to resist the connection made by the student.

"Yes, I am Black, but no, I don't get him. There are just too many factors at play for me to be sure that my blackness tamed the ill-behavior that he's supposedly prone to exhibit. And yet, because he believes I get him, that alone gives me an edge in shaping his behavior. If my being Black affects that, then I suppose it is a resource that I'll have to be aware of. Oddly enough, this is the first time I've considered my racial identity as having a single positive attribute."

The teacher candidate is rejecting a simplistic analysis of the student's sense of connection with him and that seems very positive but I believe that his words also indicate his struggle to see his identity as a potential connection with this *particular* student who seemed to enact the negative stereotypes often associated with Black students and from which this teacher candidate wants to distance himself. Elsewhere in the course, this teacher candidate grappled with ethical considerations about treating students differently based on their identities. He acknowledged that not all students arrived at school with the same opportunities. Ultimately he hopes that he will be able to "create a space that makes it easier for minority students to learn as efficiently as white students."

A Chinese Canadian woman who was very sophisticated in her analysis of equity issues in education described her identity as follows:

"I am a fair-skinned Chinese woman who is not able to speak any Chinese nor understand anything beyond basic words. However, despite not having a linguistic stake in the Chinese community, I make friends easily with people who share my cultural background. I usually feel embarrassment when I am found to be only among Chinese people as I do not want to be 'seen' as racist and I take pride in having non-Asian, non light skinned friends. I realize as well that even within the Chinese community, we also hold negative racialized views against gradients of skin colour since in older times, peasants that worked the field were darker whereas emperors stayed indoors and so were lighter skinned. I apply sunblock every day even in the winter and I don't know whether I can justify this 'internalized antiquated prejudice' based on the fact that I want to prevent the development of skin cancer."

I can imagine this woman smiling wryly as she writes these words. She has a keen understanding of the racist (and class biased) nature of attitudes around skin color within her own community but is well able to see that though she can analyze these attitudes she has also internalized them.

Another racialized woman in the class described her social identity as follows:

“When I walk out my front door as a first generation, Tamil-Canadian woman, I am aware that the identity I leave with, the one that I have defined for myself with the influence of my family and community, will undergo construction through people’s perception of me. As a first generation Canadian there is greater pressure to make use of my opportunities and create a life here, yet simultaneously, the status leaves some questioning the ‘authenticity’ of my Canadian identity and the right to claim a life here. My hyphenated identity as a Tamil-Canadian allows me to bridge both cultures together, but sometimes the sequence is questioned for what is perceived as the prioritization of one over the other. It is through my gender that I have become most aware of how context can change the impact of social identity. At home, my family has always encouraged me to be an independent woman, but I find that I am still aware of the stereotypes and limitations placed on women because of how often I see it unfold in society. When I walk back in through my front door, I am aware that the perceptions made about me today will influence how I define my social identity tomorrow, and so my social identity is always in the midst of construction.”

Interestingly, this teacher candidate’s racial identity was most prominent for her in one of her experiences from the practice teaching. Due to the need for more supervisors to observe teacher candidates in their practicum, the institution hired several retired teachers and administrators. A white man who had been a principal but had extensive teaching experience in her subject area observed this particular teacher candidate teaching. She described him as being very cordial and friendly. After observing her lesson, he mentioned that he had been a principal in an area of the city where there were a number of Tamil students. He went on to say that he hoped that this was not offensive but that he was

surprised by how much confidence she displayed for a Tamil woman. When she asked what he meant he continued by talking about how the women are generally not confident because of “what happens in their homes.” She was baffled and shocked by his comments but did not challenge this man; however, she did complain to the relevant supervisory staff at OISE/UT.

She shared this information in our first class after the practicum and explained that she did not think that this man was a “bad person” but that his behaviour was to her a clear example of white privilege. To him the norm for the expression of confidence was white people and he expressed surprise when he encountered similar confidence in a Tamil woman. Several people in the class including other racialized teacher candidates expressed the opinion that this was not an example of white privilege but of simple ignorance. Others expressed concern about her complaint to the institution and the possible repercussions this would have on this man. In the midst of this discussion another teacher candidate who self identified as a Filipino woman shared that she had been observed by this same man in another school and that he had told her after his observations that she had a “white girl’s voice.” Several questions were asked about what he might have meant by this and the teacher candidate said that based on his further comments, he was referring to the confidence with which she spoke in the classroom. This story escalated the discussion and there was at times more heat than light in what was being said. Then something quite amazing happened. A white female teacher candidate checked in with the first teacher candidate who had shared her story about this man and realized that he was the same person who had observed her teaching. She then told the class that in his comments on her teaching he made no references to any aspect of her identity. Prior to the practicum this woman and a few other women in the class, who were not very tall and who looked younger than they were, expressed concern about how these factors might work against them in the classroom because they felt that they would not be taken seriously.

The white man who did the observations in these three cases gave the white woman extensive feedback on the content of her lesson and on her teaching strategies with absolutely no

references to her race, her gender or her physical appearance. The white female teacher candidate said that she was sharing this experience because it confirmed what the first teacher candidate had claimed. To all three women and to me this was clearly a case of white privilege in operation.

After the class the white teacher candidate and the Tamil Canadian teacher candidate stayed behind to chat. The Tamil Canadian appreciated the fact that the white woman had spoken up but was concerned that for some people the voice of a white person speaking about white privilege might have carried more weight. Both teacher candidates were concerned that several of their colleagues did not see this as an example of white privilege and were more concerned for the man than for the people whom he was observing.

3. Conclusion

Teaching this course is always a true learning experience for me. I believe that supporting new teachers to be aware of their social identity and how it might influence their teaching is important work. At the same time, the concepts with which we are dealing are “messy” and slippery. I do feel that I bring extensive background knowledge of social justice and equity issues in education to my work with the teacher candidates. However, their insights, responses, and resistances to our work together continually help me to explore questions to which I do not have solid or final answers. The dynamic of each class is of course different depending on the particular composition of the group, the time in their development as teachers that the course takes place, and so many unknown factors. Still I find myself, as I think most teachers do, considering how I can learn from my experience with this group to improve the learning space for the next group that I will teach.

4. References

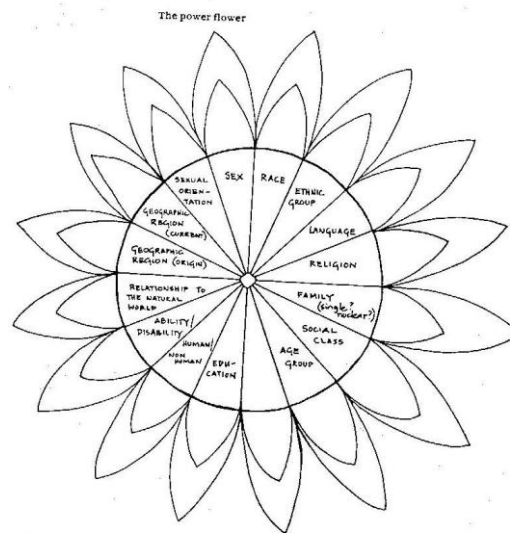
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[4] Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*. New York and London: Teachers College, Columbia University, 2012.

[5] This is Barb Thomas’ adapted version of Enid Lee’s original Flower Exercise from *Letters to Marcia: A Teacher’s Guide to Anti-Racist Education*, Toronto, Cross-Cultural Communication Centre, 1985.



[6] Claude M. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*, New York, W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2011.