

# *The Story of an Antiracist Project as Difficult Knowledge: Misalignment between Conscious Intent and Unconscious Desire*

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*Mankind never lives entirely in the present (Freud, 1933)*

## **Abstract**

This study is an exploration into the author's unconscious emotional world animated by a yearlong anti-racist project with three student teachers. Using Deborah Britzman's contemporary psychoanalytic perspective as a broad conceptual framework, the author frames the story of the antiracist project as *difficult knowledge* and uses the psychoanalytic concept of *transference* to symbolize and engage in the process of *working through* her emotional experience. The author organizes the story of the antiracist project in the following ways: the "furor to teach," fantasy of the antiracist educator, and students' uneven progress: an attachment to and idealization of certainty. The author argues that critical pedagogy that does not consider the unconscious world of the critical pedagogue is doing critical education uncritically because the effects of what we do not consciously know but nevertheless enact are central to the classroom.

## **Books Discussed**

- Britzman, D. P.  
(2003). *After-Education: Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, and Psychoanalytic Histories of Learning*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Britzman, D. P. (2009). *The Very Thought of Education: Psychoanalysis and the Impossible Professions*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Britzman, D. P.  
(2011). *Freud and Education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

## **Introduction: Beginning with the Rationalist and Individual Paradigms**

In her influential article written more than two decades ago, Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) raises an intriguing question with respect to critical pedagogy: *Why doesn't this feel empowering?* In her critique of critical pedagogy and review of the literature, Ellsworth discusses how key assumptions and pedagogical practices that undergird the literature on critical pedagogy carry *repressive myths* that perpetuate the relations of domination. Related to this idea, Ellsworth points out that the *repressive myth* carried by critical pedagogy is that teachers and students are fully rational subjects who can will themselves into different (i.e., critical) ways of being, knowing, and relating to others. While other scholars, especially within feminist and poststructuralist contexts, have been relentlessly working against and pushing beyond rationalist paradigms (e.g., Stephen Appel, bell hooks, Megan Boler, Deborah Britzman, Pattie Lather, Peter Taubman), the discourse of rationality continues to dominate the field of education – the emphasis on rational outcomes from the teacher's and students' conscious effort (Boler 1997, Britzman, 1998, 2003).

At the 2012 AERA conference in Vancouver, there was a get-together with several colleagues who claimed that we were critical multicultural educators from different national contexts. We shared our experiences of feeling frustrated, anxious, incompetent, and even hopeless about students' resistance to our attempts to unsettle taken-for-granted views and to shift their consciousness. Some of us even questioned whether our role and effort has any meaning since after a semester or two of difficult and invested teaching and discussions about the existing structural inequality and unequal power relations as well as about how one's position in the existing social structures impacts the way one understands oneself, others, as well as teaching and learning, most of our students just don't get it. Sympathizing with each other's anxiety and even despair, we tried to give one another advice, suggestions, and even strategies in hopes of they would help us help our students. My colleagues and I were sharing the feelings of frustration and pain related to not being able to make a difference in how students think. After the difficult exchanges among colleagues at the conference, I wondered what provokes and is implicit in our intense emotional response to the students. What do we bring to the critical multicultural educational encounters that propels us to expect that we will be able to shift our students' consciousness in a semester or two or ever? Britzman (2003, 2004, 2009) argues that teaching should consider something more than what is taught, and we seem to unknowingly assume that what we teach should align with what our students learn. Furthermore, why do we feel so crushed by our students' indifference to our investment and commitment in critical multicultural pedagogy? Can our heartbreaking emotional response to our students' indifference be explained simply by our desire to transform the world? This paper is an exploration of a teacher educator's response to student teachers (re)progress in an anti-racist research project interweaving and extending past and present ideas of Deborah Britzman, which will be discussed more fully in the subsequent section.

In reporting the findings from her study of secondary student teacher socialization, Britzman (1986) identifies the three cultural myths that informed the participating student teachers' views about the student world, and teaching and learning, and their ideal images of teachers. Such views

constitute their institutional biographies and reflect the dominant models of education, which are authoritative and highly individualistic. The three cultural myths that emerged throughout Britzman's study are that (1) everything depends on the teacher, (2) the teacher is the expert, and (3) teachers are self-made (p. 448). From a sociological perspective, Britzman (1986) asserts that unexamined institutional biography and cultural myths replicate the status quo, and "without a critical perspective, the relationships between school culture and power become 'housed' in prospective teachers' biographies and significantly impede their creative capacity for understanding and altering their circumstances" (p. 454).

Ellsworth's notion of the *repressive myth of rational subjects* seems to align with Britzman's notion of *cultural myth*. Both scholars conclude that critical pedagogy within rationalistic and individualistic paradigms cannot lead to social change and thus cannot be empowering. Revisiting the exchanges I had with several colleagues at the 2012 AERA conference in light of the *repressive myths of rational subjects and cultural myths*, I wonder if our emotional response to the students, however unknowingly, stems from the presumptions that the students' failure and/or unwillingness to disrupt their thinking is a symptom of our incompetence as critical multicultural educators. Our feelings echo Britzman's (1986) cultural myths, and they moreover echo Britzman's (2012) re-analysis of her cultural myths as a defense against loss and being out of control which is further described in the subsequent section. We all may have been operating within the rationalistic and individualistic paradigms that privilege individual effort while excluding the historical experiences and contexts that Britzman and Ellsworth were so critical of more than two decades ago. Following the arguments of the two scholars, then, as long as we operate within the logic of rationalism and individualism, we may be contributing to perpetuating the relations of domination in education no matter how committed we are to shifting our students' consciousness and social change. Indeed, it is often suggested that hegemony and inequality are closely tied to liberal humanism and individualism (e.g., Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Greene, 2008).

### **Looking Ahead: Extending beyond the Rationalist and Individual Paradigms**

Human psyches and emotional worlds are impacted by the structure of the relations of domination and institutions (Dubois, 1903/1994; Fanon, 2008). However, people's psyches are not separate from what they are working against, i.e., the paradigms of rationalism and individualism that support the relations of existing social structures. This means that a critical multicultural educator who strives to combat the privileging of rationalism and individualism can still subconsciously operate within the paradigms of rationalism and individualism. Moreover, teachers' emotional worlds influence their pedagogical encounters with their students, affect what counts as knowledge and how curriculum is translated even when the source of the emotions is unknown to the teachers (Britzman, 2009). Nevertheless "emotions is the least investigated aspect of research on teaching, yet it is probably the aspect most often mentioned as being important and deserving more attention" (Zembylas, 2005, p. 465). Many years after Britzman's (1986) publication of "Cultural Myths in the Making of a Teacher: Biography and Social Structure in Teacher Education," she (2013) revisited her work and stated,

At the time, I placed these myths in the service of rugged individualism, though now I think they serve to fragment the self. Through the refraction of a psychoanalytic lens these myths look suspiciously like anxiety; fear of losing, being lost, lonely, and needing help, and worrying about becoming out of control. Here is a scene of rapprochement where learning to teach provokes an old crisis of dependency (p. 103)

Britzman shifts from her earlier sociological analysis of the student teachers' views about teaching that are largely constituted by the dominant models of education, and re-analyzes the student teachers' views and cultural myths from a psychoanalytic standpoint. Britzman discusses (2013) *strange* relations between education and psychoanalysis, and she explains how educators' attachment to and idealization of certainty, which goes back to their infantile history of learning and the beginning of dependency and helplessness that are now outside their awareness, impact teaching and learning and their interaction with students. Reading my own and my colleagues' emotional responses in parallel with Britzman's (1986, 2013) work suggests that the intense feelings against student teachers' indifference to critical pedagogy did at least partially stem from *rugged individualism* and from the dominant rationalist paradigms but also from something more than that. Britzman (2013) instructs us that that something more is beyond rationalist analyses and explanation, and from her insight I speculate that, if unclaimed, that something more may function as a site of oppression.

Britzman (2011) asserts that the contribution of Freud and psychoanalysis has been that there is an unconscious, i.e., that mental processes of which we have no awareness, that affect our actions and the ideas of which we are aware. Just as the analyst does not have a psychic immune system and thus is not neutral in relation to the patient, the critical multicultural educator is not neutral in relation to her interactions with students. More specifically, emotions are a significant component of teacher and learning, and critical multicultural education that only considers oppression merely as a social construction, as only the effects of asymmetrical social structures, without considering also the complex emotional terrains inevitably invoked within real bodies and people in critical multicultural education can unwittingly contribute to the perpetuation of power inequalities. This is because those feelings that are unaccounted for in teaching and learning can get in the way for both teachers and students to productively engage in social justice work. In this essay, I am interested in exploring more deeply that *something more* so as to be able to understand the psyche and emotional world of critical multicultural educators in ways that extend the model of the internalization of the rationalism and individualism that privilege individual effort. While there are several existing psychoanalysis-based works that focus on emotions and subjectivity in education to date, much of the discussion and research on critical multicultural education in the domains of curriculum studies and teacher education has eschewed teacher's emotional world (for notable exceptions, see Britzman 1992; Wang, 2009; Shim 2012). To this end, I have undertaken a task of self-analysis in investigating and working through my own emotional world animated by a yearlong research project that the rest of this essay builds on. Although surely not identical, I use the terms anti-racist and critical multicultural pedagogy/education interchangeably hereinafter.

My attempt to theorize the representation and displacement of the unconscious emotional world was largely provoked when I realized that some aspects of my emotional responses to the participating student-teachers in a yearlong research project clearly were not intentional since they were not acceptable to me nor conducive to the goal of the research project. For Freud, any concept of free individuals that rely entirely on their conscious decisions and intentions is an illusion and “the path to school knowledge leads through or is blocked by the teacher” (Appel, 1996, p. 166). What this may mean for critical multicultural pedagogy is that the educator can lead or block the goals of the critical multicultural and antiracist curriculum. Moreover, exploration of the unconscious world of critical multicultural educators is requisite because from a psychoanalytic theoretical point of view, the teachers’ unconscious world largely shapes the teacher-student relationship and becomes the *subjective curriculum* which in turn becomes the foundation for students’ learning or not learning (Cohler, 1989; Mayes, 2009).

### **Background: Moving Beyond Awareness and Knowledge in an Anti-racist Project**

I am a Korean-American teacher educator working in a predominantly white institution and in a program in which almost all students are European Americans. As a teacher-educator who is committed to critical multicultural education, I teach a course that focuses on diversity issues including race and racism. Not surprisingly, the students have varying degrees of interest and investment in the course contents. Boler (2004) states that she engages three categories of students every semester in her social foundations course: those who are willing to engage in critical thinking, those who are resistant to critical thinking, and those who appear disaffected. My experience is that I, too, engage these three categories of students in my diversity course, but the majority fall into the second category. However, across the two semesters in 2010, there were three students in my diversity courses who I felt were the most willing and interested among those I have worked with in my teaching career. These students were particularly enthusiastic about engaging in critical thinking with the issues related to race and racism. Their contributions to the class discussions reflected that they understood how people internalize racism and that racism is a major force in the society at large.

Firmly believing in Gloria Ladson-Billing’s assertion that the first problem teachers confront is believing that successful teaching is primarily about “what to do,” when in actual fact “the problem is rooted in how we think about the social context, about the students. . .” (2006, p. 30) and given that one of the major aims in critical pedagogy is to shift people’s consciousness (Freire, 1973), I asked the three students if they would be willing to engage in a critical conversation beyond the course. I thought that working together with these students in shifting how we think might be empowering given that these students had the knowledge and attitude required for transforming their thinking and shifting their consciousness.

These students who happened to be male secondary education majors all agreed to participate in the ongoing critical conversation. The pseudonyms of the three students are Michael, Tom, and John. Starting in January 2011 lasting until December, Michael, Tom, John, and I began our

regular meetings, minimally once but sometimes twice a month. The focus of our project was to first closely monitor our everyday thoughts and perceptions in regards to people from different racial backgrounds with the assumption that such reflexive practice would open a wider door for transformative thinking and shifting consciousness.

The first three months of the project felt wonderful. I believed that the students were making continual progress and that they increasingly felt safe in the group to share their perceptions of racial Others in their everyday lives. Everyone in the group was supportive of one another. After a couple of months engaged in the regular meetings, Michael, Tom, and John also expressed that they were much better able to see that the kinds of things they used to consider appropriate were inappropriate, including racist jokes and the belief that racist thinking is okay as long as one does not act upon it. In each meeting, we were hopeful in shifting our actual thinking now that we had identified and recognized what was problematic.

When we were about four months into the project, everyone was getting tired of the similar confessions about automatic racist judgments shared among the group members. What came with four months of making explicit racial perceptions was painful realization that we were not really moving forward in practice. We began to realize that our assumption that by narrating racial differences and our representations of them we could neutralize the discomfort of racial differences and move beyond awareness may have been misguided. What I also realized then was that I was not prepared to face myself because my emotional response to the students' frustration and their inability to continue making progress was becoming intolerable. There were times when I actually ended up cancelling a few meetings because the feeling of having hit the ceiling in the project made me feel anxious, incompetent, out of control, and even resentful of the students.

What follows is an attempt to understand and engage in the process of working through my own emotional response. Because my emotional response was neither rational, intentional, nor beneficial for the goal of our research project, I interpreted these feelings as clues to the unconscious. This exploration into the emotional world is grounded in psychoanalytic concepts because significant in psychoanalytic theory is that it speaks directly to our inner selves, to the unconscious wishes, desires, impulses, and fears that constitute the unseen forces that largely determine our consciousness.

### **The Story of the Anti-Racist Project as Difficult Knowledge: Conceptual Framework**

In "Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning," Britzman (1998) uses the phrase *difficult knowledge* to illuminate "the representations of social traumas in curriculum and the individual's encounters with them in pedagogy" (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 755). Britzman (2009, 2011, 2013) believes that human experience is an emotional situation, and thus education is also an emotional situation. In this regard, Britzman (2013) contends, "the issue is not that knowledge must be called off to help others with their feelings. Rather, we all have feelings about knowledge and knowledge carries these affects" (p. 114). Drawing on Freud, Britzman (2013) argues that education is affected by uncertainty because the scenes of education

call upon our beginning and the “old crisis of dependency” (p. 114). In other words, the conflicts in the forgotten infantile history of demand for love and anxiety over its loss become a fabric of learning. Furthermore, Britzman asserts that education as an emotional situation is difficult to know because these repeated conflicts, the return of the repressed, and the effect of larger cultural and historical forces within the individual psyche are below the level of consciousness that return without rationale and thus as unaccountable feelings. Gallop (1992) calls this repeated return of the infantile learning in education as *infantile pedagogy* and she states that “teaching in general is informed by largely unconscious reactivations of powerful childhood pedagogical configurations, which of course in their specific forms vary with the individuals” (p. 6).

For Britzman (2013), education as an emotional situation is difficult to know partially because it is reminiscent of an earlier helplessness that invites painful memories of dependency and frustration. Furthermore, education as an emotional situation is difficult to know because the encounter with uncertainty that characterizes pedagogy is not something we can prepare for and because a forgotten childhood conflict knows no time and is acted out before one can remember the event (Britzman, 2011). What is also difficult about education as an emotional situation is that educators must welcome what they do not know in a field that privileges knowledge and knowing -- a contrast to a field like psychoanalysis where not knowing and uncertainty is the human condition. Over time, Britzman extended her definition of *difficult knowledge* to include the risk of ambivalence and anxiety that is involved in an education rooted in the potential loss of self and others that results from encounters with meaning that go back to the infantile history of learning, which is no longer straightforwardly referential (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 769).

I frame the story of the anti-racist project as *difficult knowledge* because my own accounted and anticipated feelings that were provoked during the project became a force that largely impacted what went on during the project. The critical pedagogue brings social subjectivity to critical multicultural education, here the antiracist project, and her social subjectivity and what underscores her subjectivity cannot preclude her forgotten infantile history of learning -- repressed childhood memories, unresolved conflicts, and unmet desires. According to Freud (1913), the interpretation of unconscious is not possible without symbolizing and narrating the affected experience, which he calls as the process of *working through*. What Freud meant by the process of *working through* was not to change the past or present circumstances. Rather, the process of *working through*, for Freud, meant ways of putting together the pieces of one’s life, however incomplete, to make a new meaning and create a new subject position so as to afford a person the capacity to *interpret reality* rather than to *comply* with it. However, according to Freud, the difficulty in *working through* is the demand for *working through* without “knowing in advance either the outcome or even the utility. What makes such a doubt difficult to interpret and accept is that its reach of is other to rationality” (Britzman, 1999, p. 4). More concretely in relation to this study, rather than allowing my intense emotional response to the students’ uneven progress a free play by engaging in the process of *working through*, I am hoping to interpret my own response and the students’ experiences differently and create a new position and story. Yet, my goal in the process of *working through* must also remain modest as I accept the uncertainty of the process and outcome.

## **Transference: Method of Analysis**

Pitt and Britzman (2003) use three psychoanalytic concepts (i.e., deferred action, transferences, and symbolization) as their conceptual archaeological tools? categories? to catalog the representation of *difficult knowledge*. In this study, I adopt the notion of transference to understand how *difficult knowledge* was communicated in the antiracist project. From a psychoanalytic point of view, transference occurs when a quality deriving from other scenes is projected on the present such as unresolved conflicts; it has two characteristics: “it must be a repetition of the past and it must be inappropriate to the present” (Greenson, 1990, p. 151). An example of the transference offered by Winnicott (1949) is “the child of the broken home, or the child without parents” spending his lifetime unconsciously looking for his parents (p. 72). Freud (1990) similarly illustrated the dynamics of transference: “If someone’s need for love is not entirely satisfied by reality, he is bound to approach every new person whom he meets with libidinal anticipatory ideas” (p. 28). In education, transference refers to the unconscious exchange of love, desire, authority, and knowledge that stem from the infantile and earlier history of learning being projected into new experiences and people within pedagogical scenes. People develop omnipotence to defend against their early helplessness, and throughout their lives, they continue to unconsciously attempt to maintain omnipotence. Hence, the transference of early helplessness reveals itself as they continually but unconsciously defend themselves against certainty and try to have a secure relation with others. Britzman (2013) states that “there is no teaching or learning without the transference and yet, the transference. . . may serve as resistance to learning (p. 105). Taubman (2012) discusses the importance of teachers to attend to “their own feelings and ideation aroused by their students” (p. 56). If such are inherent conditions of teaching and learning then there is no teaching and learning in critical multicultural and antiracist education without transference, and the critical multicultural educator must attend to the emotions provoked by students because such transferred emotions may serve as resistance to the goal of critical pedagogy. As will be illustrated further below, I have come to believe that my own anxiety about the unknown destiny of the anti-racist project in terms of the students’ progress can be usefully viewed from a psychoanalytic point of view as unresolved libidinal experiences that at times worked against facilitating the kind of context in which the students could continue to explore their racial thinking. What follows is an exploration of what is carried by the transference in my emotional response to the students’ uneven progress but because the unconscious cannot be observed directly, the analysis of the displacement of the unconscious through transference remains largely speculative; and, I use the work of Britzman and other scholars as a critical mirror to my analysis.

## **The Process of Working Through: Self Analysis**

Within a few months of what initially started as an exciting project, I went from feeling like a wonderful and empowering teacher/facilitator to feeling like a very bad teacher/facilitator. For example, John in a meeting in the second month of the project stated:



I am becoming much more acute in noticing how I think and others think about people from different racial backgrounds. I noticed that I am looking for the assumptions underneath the statements of myself and others that may seem simple on the surface but carry assumptions that are not correct and even dangerous.

Similarly, Tom in a meeting in the second month of the project expressed:

I have personally been exploring the motivating factors behind prejudices and have been attempting to find answers to big picture questions such as *why do prejudices exist?*

The comments like these made me feel like the students were making the progress which also made me feel like I was a successful teacher. However, both John and Tom expressed their experiences very differently and with less confidence only a few months later in the project.

In a meeting in the fifth month of the project, John stated:

The constant attempt to improve seems the hardest for me. It isn't always easy to monitor what you are doing or saying. Sometimes the process of attempting to improve becomes so exhausting that being in a room filled only with other white men would be easier. There is a relaxing comfort in that horrible thought. In this room I can't offend anyone because of who they are and some unthinking comment that slips out of my mouth.

Similarly, Tom in a meeting in the fifth month of the project expressed:

I started dreading come to this meeting because the feeling I end up taking with me after the meeting. I am feeling like I am a hopeless white racist as I am beginning to realize that making change in how I actually think may be almost impossible.

Each time I encountered the students' comments like the ones above, I felt my face redden and rising panic as I wondered how I could come up with effective strategies to move my students beyond what I saw as being stuck which was largely due to my incompetence as a teacher. The students are often quick in reading my emotional and physical response and we sometimes ended up wrapping up our discussions much earlier than the lively ones at the beginning of the project.

In her discussion of her own teaching experience thirty years ago as a public alternative high school English teacher, Britzman (2004) talks about how her idealization of teaching and learning, which she described as the *furor to teach*, borrowing Gardner's (1999) term, resulted in her inability to understand students' interests and their literacy skills, and her inability to read the assigned book from students' perspectives. In this work, Britzman describes the feeling of insecurity provoked by the misalignment between what she imagined and what occurred in her English classroom. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Britzman interprets such a feeling of inadequacy as a defense against the loss of authority, control, but also as a defense against the loss of love from her students that has a long history of dependency on others. Such a childhood history of wishes for love and anxiety

over its loss no longer corresponds to what has already happened; however, it projects itself onto the present pedagogical scene as a demand for certainty (Britzman, 2004). Below, through the dynamics of transference as a way into exploring myself as a subject learning from the unconscious story and logic of the antiracist project as an emotional situation difficult to know, I discuss how unconscious reality and its transference is the affecting difficulty in antiracist pedagogy and critical multicultural education. I organize the story of the anti-racist project as *difficult knowledge* in the following ways: “the furor to teach,” fantasy of the anti-racist educator, and students’ uneven progress: my attachment to and idealization of certainty—I do this in my effort to understand and show the complexities of difficult emotional knowledge which on its surface may only appear as irrational but nevertheless has pedagogical consequences.

### **My furor to teach**

In my thinking about the problem of the anti-racist project in terms of teaching and learning, Gardner’s (1999) work and his notion of the “furor to teach” is helpful. Gardner, who has been a teacher of psychoanalysis for many years, speaks about his personal furor to teach, impelled by his need to teach and his idealization of teaching and himself as a teacher who knows everything and can teach everything to his students. He characterizes the attitudes of a true teacher drawing on his drive to the “furor to teach” as a teacher who must be willing to take risks, who learns that failures and criticisms are inevitable in teaching and learning, and who never rests. In regards to Gardner’s (1999) furor to teach, he states:

I have found myself subject to the fullest furor to teach when consumed by the notion that I know something – something inherited or newly discovered—that my students not only need urgently to learn but are also to learn only from me. (p. 95)

In the anti-racist project and especially about the time when we started to feel that the students were not making visible progress, driven by my “furor to teach, I began to invest more of myself and my narcissism into the project,” In a meeting in the fifth month of the project I asked Michael how he felt about the project so far, and he stated that “what I improved in one month, two months, and three months gets lost in a single unthinking moment and I feel hopeless.” Even though I knew otherwise cognitively, I felt that as a racial minority teacher educator, I had something to teach the white pre-service teachers and that they had to learn from me. I was growing anxious that *my working with them* did not stick with them, and I began wondering what I was doing wrong. My own investment in and commitment in anti-racist pedagogy and critical multicultural education was projected onto and even imposed upon the students, and it became apparent that my furor to teach in the project was beginning to make the students feel anxious and even nervous. In one meeting, when I announced to the students that we will have to think and work harder in our collective effort to help each other continue making a progress, Tom expressed,

“Honestly, the courage just isn’t always there. The exhaustion of trying to improve personally is itself overwhelming and pointing out the mistakes of others feels nearly impossible at times.”

What made the matter even more difficult to know at the time was that rather than seeing the students' anxiety and nervousness as in part a response to my furor to teach and frustration with their own learning, I read their emotional response as withdrawal from and reluctance to further participate in the project. My transference to the students, whom I unconsciously saw as rational beings, i.e., subjects presumed to know, involuntarily returned to the image of myself as a *teacher who is the expert* and on whom *everything depends* (Britzman, 1986). Therefore, the students' regression in the project felt as though their failures in knowledge were all *my fault* which felt isolating since all three students were going through almost identical experiences despite the fact that I was putting in more and more effort in providing an open context in which I thought was a safe environment for them to continue reflect on their thinking and change how they think. What's wrong with my students? Do they not want to participate in this project anymore? I would ask such a series of questions accompanied by a high level of discomfort. From a psychoanalytic point of view, what I perceived as the students' withdrawal from and reluctance in further working toward changing how they thought about racial Others in the project provoked the past developmental fear that the loss of love was right around the corner.

### **Fantasy of the critical multicultural educator**

Re-invoking Britzman (1986), her notion of cultural myths, i.e., (1) everything depends on the teacher; (2) the teacher is the expert; (3) teachers are self-made (p. 448), are a defense against narcissistic wounds (Britzman, 2013), and they also appear to be driven by the "furor to teach" And vice versa. In her article, "Monsters in literature," the monsters were animated by the furor to teach for Britzman (2004), in which her need to teach well and her own ideas about how to teach the literature prevented her from understanding the capacity and needs of the students. Also in "Novel Education," Britzman (2003) states that she possessed the "furor to teach and furor to teach her politics" (p. 118). Driven by the "furor to teach" her politics, Britzman assumed that her role as an educator was to convince her students of their political obligations and, therefore, she felt that she should offer her students clear outcomes without thinking about ambivalence or paradox inherent in critical pedagogy.

In the anti-racist project, I was subject to the cultural myths of my omnipotence and the idealization of myself as a teacher/facilitator. This meant that the entire responsibility for the process and outcome of the antiracist project fell on me. Now, I see that a part of me was thinking that I must save these students. In this respect, citing Bettelheim (1979), Britzman (1999) states that "the teacher-as-hero is more like a wish that disguises the larger social anxiety over the saving of children and adolescents and the teacher's desires for rescue fantasies" (p. 9). The idealization of my role as a teacher/facilitator in the project was consistent with Britzman's (1986) notion of cultural myths. That is, my beliefs had their roots in the dominant cultural forces which views a teacher as someone in control entirely and those beliefs triggered emotions stemming from my own infantile complexes that were otherwise unconscious. An exploration of the unconscious through psychoanalysis illuminates the relationship between the inner world of the individual psyche and the outer world of society or realities and how these forces shape conscious motivation

in everyday pedagogical encounters. Furthermore, the unanticipated conflicts that arose from the misalignment between what I expected and the process which the students were actually going through in the project created tension and an emotional situation difficult to know and interpret.

Another problem with this “furor to teach” and fantasy of the critical multicultural educator who must save the students and the world while unconditionally accommodating and loving her students is that I could not really be myself. I felt the obligation to remain energetic, loving, and positive, a feeling that stemmed from my ideas about what it means to be a good teacher. However, from about the fourth month of the project, it became too difficult because of my attachment to and investment in the goal of the antiracist project, and I felt hurt by any signs of lack of interest in the students’ comments. At times, when the participating teachers expressed the kinds of exhaustion, frustration, and hopelessness of their experiences of engaging in the project, I could literally sense my neck and face feeling hot. Sometimes, I felt my stomach turning and experienced surge of adrenaline due to my own anxiety even as I tried to remain calm. There were many sleepless nights wondering where things might have gone wrong.

Traditionally, the teacher’s role discourages the acknowledgement of any negative feelings towards her students, but nevertheless, I have often felt angry with students whose progress did not follow my expectations and plans. There were times when I thought I should have invited a different set of participants for the project. Thinking within psychoanalytic terms, the threat of loss of authority, knowledge, and control was transferred to feelings of anger, despair, and frustration that led to heartbreak. The fantasy of a critical multicultural educator who always knows what to do, who is not affected by desire, who is not affected by childhood learning, and who can survive students’ aggression was in danger of being crushed, and my sensitivity to the students comments hinting at any regression in the antiracist project showed how easily I could be rattled, and hence how fragile my claim to being a committed and strong critical multicultural educator actually was.

### **Students’ uneven progress: My attachment to and idealization of certainty**

I recall that in one meeting I grew very agitated with the group and told the students that by *now we should really be making more progress than we have been during last couple months*. This comment was triggered by one student’s statement about a difficulty involved in making a change in how he thinks about racial Others when he is surrounded by friends and family who are not at all supportive of his commitment. I remember feeling angry: I did not want to hear any factors that limit the students’ progress in the antiracist project. In my mind, the students were supposed to continue making the progress that they were making during the first two months of the project. I also recall the students giving me back a blank stare as if they too were unbelievably frustrated and want to tell me *what more would you like us to do?* After the meeting, I was shaken by my own impatient response to the students and began fearing that my reactions are not worthy of a committed critical multicultural educator.

In deconstructing the myth of development in teacher education, Britzman (2007) argues that development is often presumed to be an even process, a getting over and correction of childhood, which she perceives from a psychoanalytic standpoint as a defense against the desire for certainty rooted in infantile history. She proposes a view of development as an uneven process that involves regression to and repeated childhood conflicts in which the residues of “our childhood slip through the backdoor of our theories of teaching and learning” (p. 2). In inviting educators to consider the areas of development in the field of teacher education from the vantage point of its “uneven and uncertain qualities because of its relation to our fact of dependency” (Britzman, 2007, p. 8), she further characterizes development as learning to live with others in the past and present. According to Britzman (2007), understanding what other people are like by nature leaves development as an unknown and ambivalent destiny because teachers are “taking responsibility for a mind they have not made” (p. 8). In this respect, Britzman asserts that we have to welcome what cannot be understood if our work involves understanding the minds of others even if the learning to not know is not a common area of focus in the field of education.

In the antiracist project, disappointment about the students’ non-linear and uneven progress began to rise within me, and through the psychoanalytic idea of the unconscious, I began to see that what was central to my disappointment was that I was unable to tolerate the feeling of being unhelpful and incompetent as well as the feeling of an uncertain destiny of this project. I began to push the students harder -- driven by the “furor to teach” and by the fantasy of being a critical multiculturalist -- so that what I perceived as a mess in the project could be settled. I could not figure out where things got side tracked and why the pre-service teachers whom I viewed as so well equipped to participate in this project *just did not get it*. It did not occur to me at the time that this kind of uncertainty and uneven progress is actually to be expected in any teaching and learning context including critical antiracist educational context. In “Freud and Education,” Britzman (2011) talks about practitioners’ demand for a manual. Seen through a psychoanalytic lens, the demand for a manual seems to be a solution to a profession’s anxiety. Britzman notes manuals are “unconsciously linked to the infantile wish for an absolute knowledge, so indexing a piece of psychoanalytic transference” (p. 83). In just this way, my anxiety that arose from the students’ non-linear development in the project, which in turn hinted at the unknown outcome of the project, may have been similarly linked to the infantile wish for certainty and wholeness. The less I am aware of my misconception about development and the unconscious that largely drive my assumptions about progress and development, the more likely I am to be disappointed and unable to engage in antiracist pedagogy in productive ways I am demanding certainty, immediate satisfaction, and clear outcomes from anti-racist pedagogy, which in reality by nature is terribly uncertain and ambivalent. From this vantage point, antiracist pedagogy is an inherently (?) conflictive emotional situation.

### **Psychoanalysis and Critical Multicultural Education: Discussion and Implications**

I realize that not much seemed to have been settled in the analysis of my emotional experience. However, the goal of this paper is not to bring myself in tune with reality or even trace back the exact and complete sources of my emotional worlds. Rather, what I hope this process of *working*

*through* my emotional world has illuminated is that we as critical multicultural educators must face our own unconscious needs, and desires, and the conflicts that arise from them. The critical multicultural pedagogical encounter, as partially shown in the exploration of my own emotional world that at the time I was unaware of but that nevertheless animated the antiracist project, returns us to the infantile history of learning, dependency, and helplessness. This early history of learning and frustration that is repressed never entirely disappears, but often irrupts without any invitation, awareness, or rational reasons in pedagogical encounters. Both the unconscious desire for love and the fearing of its loss are brought to critical multicultural pedagogical encounters, and the feeling of uncertainty makes us nervous because it indexes a loss. Considering critical multicultural education as an *emotional situation difficult to know* from a psychoanalytic standpoint—instructs us that not all is settled or possibly can be in critical multicultural knowledge. Below, then, are some important implications for critical multicultural education and educators.

Before discussing the implications, I wish to clarify that my intention in this essay was not to generalize my experience of engaging in the process of *working through* the emotional response that arose in the antiracist project. In this regard, Bion (1962) contends that psychoanalysis is very subjective and the way he does analysis is important to himself only and not to others but it may give others some idea of how they may do analysis, which *is* important. I agree with Bion's assertion, and the aim in this essay is to learn from the anxiety, transference, and unconscious emotional world that critical multicultural learning inevitably involves and that often serve as resistance to learning. I hope my analysis encourages other critical multicultural educators to interpret and think about the emotions that arise in their pedagogical encounters.

### **Re-imagining critical multicultural educator and empowerment**

What might critical multicultural education that takes the complex affective dimension seriously look like? What happens to a critical pedagogue's consciousness when she tries to shift her students' consciousness? From a psychoanalytic account, the conscious intent is influenced by the unconscious and its forces are not immediately known to us, and critical multicultural educators whose goal includes shifting the students' consciousness must be aware of their own incompleteness and tolerate doubt and uncertainty about our work. As shown above, my emotional responses to the students reflect that what transpires in the antiracist project, which was against my rational thinking and educational commitment, was what I do not know and cannot anticipate. Given that the imbalance between the number of white teachers and the ever-increasing number of students from diverse backgrounds accurately describes the current situation in many educational settings in the world (Bergh, Denessen, Hornsta, Voeten, & Holland, 2010), it is also fair to state that critical multicultural education work often involves a continual indirect and/or direct engagement with others who often do not share common backgrounds as those of (student) teachers which was the case in the antiracist project. Such difference can exacerbate feelings of separation between (student) teacher and the other, and when we consider the psychoanalytic insight about "our phantasies for omnipotence and the attraction of absolute knowledge" (Britzman, 2013a, p. 4), critical multicultural education particular poses more difficulty with respect to an ego defense

against unknown. This in turn often causes anxiety, frustration, and anticipation over the loss of love for (student) teachers which in turn also causes anxiety, frustration, and anticipation over the loss of love for the teacher educator working with (student) teachers. Such psychoanalytic reality then becomes *difficult knowledge* woven into our pedagogical encounters which we are unaware of because we often “cannot wake up and tell the difference between wishful mental acts and what reality actually presents” (Britzman, 2013a, p. 3). That said, it is hardly surprising that educators in general experience difficulty and resist recognizing perspectives that describe the effects of what we do not know in our lives, teaching, and learning. In this respect, this study sought to elaborate problems inherent in critical multicultural teaching and learning and why and how unknown emotional world filters what goes on in critical multicultural educational settings like the one that was described in this study.

Returning to Ellsworth’s (1989) question, *why doesn’t this feel empowering*, we also return to her critique of critical pedagogy in which “empowerment is made dependent on rationalism” (p. 307). Ellsworth also discusses the notion of re-learning what it means to be empowered in critical pedagogy; from a psychoanalytic view, re-learning what it means to be a critical multicultural educator must entail an effort to enter the unconscious emotional world and leave rational thoughts behind. This process is more often than not unthinkable especially given that currently education is obsessed with incorporating right technology, strategy, and corrections (Pinar, 2003). I too have desperately wished that I could come up with more effective strategies when I felt that the participating students were regressing in the project. The frustration and desperation that I and the colleagues whom I met at the recent conference felt is another good example. What my colleagues and I were concerned about was students’ inability to understand the aim of critical pedagogy, but not one of us entertained the possibility that our anxiety stemming from the idealization of critical pedagogy, and the transference of our desire for certainty might be further hindering our students’ learning. Psychoanalytic theory teaches us that education carries psychical consequences and there can be no education without anxiety and fear, but I as a facilitator of the antiracist project and those of us (at the conference) who claimed to be critical multicultural educators committed to social change could not bear the feeling of helplessness, frustration, and anxiety. We were all looking for strategies that would help us so that what we teach aligns with what our students learn, which in turn, we assumed, will relieve us from the intolerable feelings we were experiencing.

In this regard, “education is more than the deliberation of teachers and students” (Britzman, 2011, p. 58), and educators must always pay attention to the other side of consciousness—the unconscious—because the effects of what we do not consciously know but nevertheless enact are central to the classroom (Britzman, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2009, 2011). Hence, re-learning what it means to be a critical multicultural educator involves giving vocabulary to irrational emotional responses that arise in pedagogical encounters and tolerate anxiety so that *difficult knowledge* such as the “furor to teach,” fantasy of the antiracist educator, and attachment to and idealization of certainty, for example, can be thought about in the heat of moment rather than leaving them unavailable to thought and thus unavailable for a new story and experience.

Critical multicultural educators are subject to the drives and the unconscious; and the symptoms like anxiety, frustration, and anger most often dismissed as meaningless in critical multicultural education may have significant meaning when viewed through a psychoanalytic lens. What it means to be critical multicultural educators must include recognizing that our vulnerability involves our susceptibility to be influenced by what is unknown and the primary helplessness that reveals itself through the social forces that we have internalized as shown in Britzman's (1986, 2013) work and my own analysis of the emotions felt in the antiracist project. Bringing together critical multicultural education and psychoanalysis, I ask whether critical pedagogy that does not take into account the unspoken emotions and affects that shape our pedagogical encounters can really be critical and empowering.

Just as a patient influences the emotional state of an analyst in a therapy session, so do students influence the emotional state of an educator, and "from a psychoanalytic perspective, the curriculum is a product of the dynamic interplay between teacher and student (Field, 1989, p. 974). Critical multicultural pedagogy then is a task that relationally requires more serious emotional effort since it is an emotional situation difficult to know, and critical multicultural educators must be prepared to enter into an intense pedagogical encounter with students. In my case, I was not anticipating such emotional labor when I first entered the anti-racist project, and my being unprepared to face my vulnerability derailed the goal of the project for some time. In this regard, I would also add that an attempt to shift students' consciousness involves the critical multicultural educator's ongoing and often personally painful struggle with the unpredictable and uncertain process of her own emotional state. While not a therapist, the critical multicultural educator is involved in the goal of changing the world through transforming the consciousness of the students. In the rest of the essay, I discuss why such a goal of the critical multicultural educators, i.e., our self-conscious intent, is better served when unconscious motives are also taken into account.

### **Why consider the unconscious in critical multicultural education**

Winnicott (1949) argues that therapy adapts to the needs of the analyst unless the analyst's emotional response to the patient is extremely well understood and sorted out. I suggest that the same challenge is true in a critical multicultural event. Unless the critical multicultural educators' inner worlds are acknowledged and sorted out, their teaching and learning can become largely a meeting of the needs of the educator. In the antiracist project, I initially acted out the intolerable feelings that were driven largely by unconscious desires by cancelling a few meetings, putting enormous pressure on the students, and making impatient comments, which were counterproductive to the goal of the project. In other words, my subjective emotional states impacted and truncated the pedagogical encounters with the students.

Here, Bion's (1962) model of containment, his view of feeling and thinking about feeling, is educative. More specifically, Bion foregrounds the role of the mother (*the container*) in the development trajectory of the infant (*the contained*), and he and others have used the model of *containment* in the therapy setting. In the context of the mother and infant relationship, the *containing* model



refers to the mother's capacity to *have* the experience, even if it is a negative one, in the sense of staying with it rather than dismissing it so as to think about and engage with the experience which is a necessary condition for nurturing the infant and its development (Wadell, 1998). In the context of the analyst and patient relationship, the *containing* mind allows the analyst to apprehend transference. In other words, the more the analyst is able to *contain* the transference feelings, the more likely the analyst is to be able to give a new meaning to the experience and the more likely it is that the patient will benefit from the therapy session because it is less colored by the analyst's emotions (Cartwright, 2010).

In critical multicultural education, to advocate containing the emotional experiences in pedagogical encounters does not mean being passively receptive to the students' inability or unwillingness to shift their consciousness. Alternatively, the *containing* function should take on an active psychical process in which *working through* the emotional experience is ultimately beneficial and growth promoting to both the educator and students (Wadell, 1998). I believe that the effort to work through the emotional process described in this essay will slowly allow me to *contain* the frustration and anxiety rather than project them right back onto the students. In other words, through the process of interpretation, my feelings can be thought about, which in turn will not only enable me to be less easily rattled by the students' uneven progress but also understand and recognize the feelings, whether of anger, anxiety, or fear so that they do not take over my pedagogical practices inappropriately. Such a *containing* mind will benefit my growth as a critical multicultural educator and is necessary for facilitating an environment in which students' ability to think critically and disrupt their assumptions is supported rather than undermined. I believe it takes time to establish a containing mind, but I also believe that the practice of working through the emotional experience in critical multicultural and antiracist educational context allows a teacher's capacity to recognize that uncertainty and the accompanying anxiety is unavoidable in critical multicultural education.

Appel (1998) states that emotions underpin the hidden curriculum. Britzman (1999) argues that educators must "engage with the student's capacity for illusion and disillusion in learning" (p. 9) which can be interpreted to mean that educators must be able to contain their emotional reactions to students' progress and regress in teaching and learning even if their patterns of learning are upsetting to the educators. *Working through* the emotional experience, from a psychoanalytic point of view allows the critical multicultural educator to engage with the student's uneven progress (and regression at times) without alienating the students. I believe that when I cancelled a few meetings in the antiracist project and when I put an enormous stress on the students to think deeper, I alienated them, which was not effective.

Psychoanalysis provides a powerful analytic tool that allows us as critical multicultural educators to explore our unconscious inner worlds so that we are less influenced by our omnipotence that is intertwined with social and cultural forces. In closing, I believe that not considering the unconscious emotional world of critical multicultural educators is doing critical multicultural education uncritically. Future research calls for exploring the emotional worlds of the students and how they interact with the emotional worlds of critical multicultural educators.

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