A lesson in teaching English while White

Abstract

This article offers a close analysis of a 90-minute teaching sequence in an English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom of an adult basic education (ABE) program for refugee-background learners in a Finnish community college. The White European-heritage teacher, the author of the article, researcher on-site, and substitute teacher at that point, taught a lesson with a focus on ownership of English to a group of about 15 adult learners of color from mostly Middle Eastern and African backgrounds. She used peer-supported discourse analysis of the lesson transcript to better understand the processes of Whiteness that interfered with students' learning and engagement during the lesson. This revealed that the researcher-teacher's discourses and practices erased racial differences between her and the learners, perpetuated Eurocentric ideologies of argumentation, and positioned her as "white listening subject" (Flores and Rosa, 2015) vis-à-vis the students.

A theoretical lens of Critical Whiteness Pedagogy (e.g., Matias & Mackey, 2016) helps understand these findings within larger racist and Eurocentric structures of educational systems and socialization. Each finding feeds into recommendations for teachers and teacher educators, particularly those who received their education in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) but work in racially and culturally diverse contexts.

Introduction

How can teaching English for social justice fail, and what lessons can be learned from it? This article offers a close analysis of a 90-minute teaching sequence in an English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom of an adult basic education (ABE) program for refugee-background learners in a Finnish community college. As the White teacher of the class and author of the article, I examine the classroom discourse I engaged in and promoted through a lens of Critical Whiteness. The motivation for this study originated from a general feeling of dissatisfaction with my class, mostly due to the student disengagement and lack of dialogue I noticed. Taking advantage of my role as researcher at the school, I decided to closely examine the data I had from that day. As the only White person in the room, it stood to reason to pay particular attention to the discourses of Whiteness I enacted. A self-study of this kind is not merely an exercise in self-reflection, nor should it be understood as a stand-in for anti-racist action (Lensmire et al., 2013). Rather, the intention of this piece is to enhance the readers' and my own understanding of how discourses of Whiteness work in classrooms, often in unnoticed and normalized ways. It is also an invitation to White teachers, researchers, and teacher educators to closely look at (their own) classroom discourse, learn to see "tools of Whiteness" (Picower, 2009) in it, and actively challenge them through education, research, and activism.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Whiteness Studies

The starting point of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) is the hegemony and normalization of Whiteness that prevails in many predominantly White societies. It understands Whiteness as "ideology of White supremacy that works through discourses" (Fylkesnes, 2018, p. 25). For this paper, and in alignment with prior work (e.g., Picower, 2009), I understand such discourses of Whiteness as those that oppose or hinder the work of Critical Race Theory (see below; Solórzano, 2019) and thus work to uphold White supremacy, for instance by promoting colorevasiveness, describing education as racially neutral, and diminishing the experience of people of color (POC) or the centrality of race in human interaction and societal structures. While discourses of Whiteness can be explicit, they can also maintain White supremacy implicitly, for example by limiting spaces for and voices of POC or foregrounding White people and experiences.

As Leonardo (2004) noted, White supremacy is not a coincidence, but the result of a systematic process of White people claiming and protecting their privileges and domination. This definition of Whiteness has two important implications. First, Whiteness is not merely a racial category (Frankenberg, 1993) but often discursively co-constructed with monolingualism, epistemic and epistemological legitimacy (Ennser-Kananen, 2019), and Euro-American identities. Second, taking a close look at classroom discourses as potential tools of Whiteness is pertinent, which is the main goal of this article.

Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) has been recognized as one important approach to dismantling White supremacy and supporting anti-racist education and, more generally, Critical Race Theory (CRT) (e.g., Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon, Galindo, 2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The centrality of race and POC's experiences, the rejection of colorevasive discourses, and a commitment to social justice are some of the basic tenets of CRT. Within education and teacher education, CRT centers the stories of students and teachers of color and strives for transformative practice and racial equity (Solórzano, 2019). In a sense, CWS can be seen as an arm of CRT that unveils the normative and hegemonic nature of Whiteness and its implications for individuals, societies, and communities, including educational contexts. Normative Whiteness persists in schools, because, as Picower (2009) explains, "White teachers are often entering the profession with a lifetime of hegemonic reinforcement to see students of color and their communities as dangerous and at fault for the educational challenges they face" (p. 211). Thus, beyond individual responsibility, socio-political decisions of the past and present have built a racially oppressive system that keeps educational success and welfare predominantly in the hands of White people.

As several scholars have pointed out, an approach to pedagogy that subscribes to CWS needs to retain an image of White teachers that allows for transformation and learning. Leonardo (2002) explains:

> A critical pedagogy of whiteness must [...] forge a third space for neo-abolitionist whites as neither enemy nor ally but a concrete subject of struggle, an identity which is 'always more than one thing, and never the same thing twice' (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 266). This new positionality will be guided by non-white discourses. (p. 46)

Although many efforts exist to provide such guidance and educate White teachers about racial justice, studies reporting on the success of such efforts paint a mixed picture.

Literature Review

White teachers perpetuating White supremacy

Ample research exists that documents the harm White teachers cause for SOC and the shortcomings of teacher education programs in addressing this. For instance, Sleeter (2008) commented on White preservice teachers' unawareness of racism, their deficit perspective on SOC, their prejudice and ignorance vis-à-vis communities of color, and their unawareness of their own cultural identities as pressing areas that need to be addressed in teacher education. Elsewhere (2005), she found White teachers to be resistant to change even after a two-year teacher development program. Such observations are echoed by many scholars. For instance, McIntyre's (2002) and Picower's (2009) work with White female pre-service teachers revealed teachers' deficit perspectives on SOC, which minimized the SOC's experience of racism. Teachers' investment in White supremacy, even of self-identified "good teachers" (Hyland, 2005), was found to persist despite anti-racism and Critical Whiteness education (Hyland, 2005; Hytten & Warren, 2003/2010). In fact, as Matias et al. (2014) demonstrated in their study with 16 pre-service teachers, engaging with Whiteness did not necessarily lead to self-reflection and even affirmed White identities. In addition, Levine-Rasky (2000) showed that racist stances such as an unawareness of White privilege and an inability to critique normalized social power structures, remained relatively consistent across White teacher candidates, irrespective of their value systems. Although White teachers seemed to be able to build rapport with their SOC, Marx (2008) found these relationships to blind out students' cultural and racial backgrounds. In all, while there is certainly interventions against White supremacy in educational contexts, the persistence of it calls for a continuous systematic effort of anti-racist education and a self-critical examination of Whiteness across subject areas.

Besides the lack or ineffectiveness of education, unawareness or inadequate interpretations of White privilege have been identified as a problem (Merryfield, 2000). For instance, Arsenault (2018) concluded from her study with five White teachers that her participants' intellectual understanding of racism did not translate into antiracist actions. She argued that White teachers need tools for "assessing their privileges in the context of institutions that promote such privileges" (p. 141). In other words, integrating personal and systemic critique and transformation can make Critical Whiteness Pedagogies (CWP) an effective approach. To that end, Howard, (2016), using himself as an example, outlined the development of White antiracist identities from fundamentalist to transformationist orientations, a process that is grounded in thorough self-reflection. The call for self-reflection and -transformation was also answered by Matias and Mackey (2016), whose analysis offered a hopeful picture of their students practicing self-critique as they engaged with intersectional approaches to thinking about race, class, gender, and sexual identity and the emotional work this entails.

To support White teachers' development, several scholars have underlined the complex, ambivalent, and contextual character of their actions and identities (Lensmire 2010, 2012; Levine-Rasky, 2000) and promoted an understanding of the White teacher as a subject "who both challenges yet enacts, critiques yet complies" (Jupp & Slattery, 2010, p. 211). As Nichols (2010) explains, such a "double consciousness" helps White students and teachers "admit to [their] complicity while striving for justice" (p. 9). This account of my teaching is undergirded by such a consciousness.

Although there is ample research that examines the discourses of White teachers based on interview data (see above), studies that show how Whiteness is constructed in classroom discourse are scarce. Yoon (2012) analyzed how a group of White female teachers enacts Whiteness and how "whiteness-at-work", the paradoxes of teachers' "beliefs, intentions, and actions" (p. 587) was constructed in classroom and peer-group discourse, for instance through rephrasing race talk as politeness issue or focusing on the "educative dilemma" (p. 607) of educating fellow White people rather than accepting responsibility for racist discourses. In Australia, Walton et al. (2016) examined White teacher discourses in an elementary school context and found many to be lacking a deep critique of the representation of national identities as Anglo and White. They call for curricular structures that support teachers in understanding and challenging White normativity (especially in relation to national identity).

This prior work is a critical contribution to anti-racist education. A discursive analysis of Whiteness enables teachers and teacher educators to design effective measures for dismantling it. The onus of doing this work is on all agents of Whiteness in education, for instance White teachers. Given the urgent need for anti-racist and Critical Whiteness education, self-studies analyzing and deconstructing discourses of Whiteness are surprisingly absent from the field of language education, particularly TESOL.

Critical Whiteness and decolonizing TESOL

Several scholars have pushed for a decolonizing of the field of TESOL. For example, Motha (2006) examined how language minority students in the US negotiate racial and linguistic power structures and what role their ESOL teachers play in this process. Her analyses of observations and informal interviews with four female ESOL teachers confirmed the dominance of monolingual identities and the deficit approach to ESOL that permeates many US educational contexts. It also described spaces of resistance and ambiguity about what legitimate linguistic practices and knowledges are. Her work is an important call to viewing TESOL through the lenses of colonialism and White supremacy. Earlier analyses of colonial processes in the field of TESOL include Canagarajah's critical ethnography in Sri Lanka (1999), based on which he suggested forefronting the agency of English learners and communities of color in the margins of the anglocentric TESOL publishing world. Additionally, Pennycook (2007) pointed to the historical, political/economic, and cultural relationships between ELT and colonialism, and elsewhere (1998) argued that the field remains shaped by the "colonial construction of Self and the Other, of the 'TE' and SOL' of TESOL" (1998, p. 22). This argument was, for instance, illustrated by Kubota's (1999) work

on the othering of Japanese culture. Rather than reinscribing colonial discourses, Pennycook (1998) called for counterdiscourses (e.g., Kubota, 1999) and alternative approaches to TESOL research, pedagogies, and materials. Such counterdiscourses include the exposing and dismantling of White norms in English teaching, as exemplified by Marx's (2006) study with nine White female pre-service teachers of Latinx English learners, which revealed how the teachers' racism was enacted unconsciously and invisibly (to them) through discourses of Whiteness. Of course, such dynamics are not limited to the TESOL contexts in the US.

Anti-racist and Critical Whiteness Education in Finland

Although the field of CWS originated in the US and is shaped by its socio-historical and socio-political context, its applications and relevance reach far beyond. Also in Finland, where the teaching force is similarly gendered and raced, there is a need for CWS that examines and challenges White supremacy in education. Some studies exist in the Finnish context that have documented the need for multicultural education and respective teacher training (e.g., Acquah & Commins, 2013), but research that explicitly addressed racism is harder to come by. Although the recent past has seen important attempts to bring anti-racism education into the public debate and into schools (Alemanji, 2016; Alemanji & Mafi, 2018; Alemanji & Dervin, 2016; Armila, Rannikko, Sotkasiira, 2017; Layne & Alemanji, 2015), such studies remain scarce. Similarly, CWS is still in its infancy in Finland. Prior work has challenged the normalization of Whiteness in visual culture (Kallio-Tavin & Tavin, 2018), among Russian-speaking migrant youth (Krivonos, 2018), and in relation to Finnish exceptionalism (Rastas, 2016), but, surprisingly, no studies have examined Whiteness in school contexts.

The meaning of Whiteness is both locally shaped and applicable across national contexts. In Finland, Whiteness is often equated with Finnish citizenship and Finnish (or Swedish) first language proficiency, and references to educational excellence, minority rights, and constitutional bilingualism are frequently brought into the discussion. In addition to such local manifestations of Whiteness, there are commonalities in Whiteness discourses across contexts including, for instance, colorevasiveness, the alleged neutral/unpolitical nature of schooling, and naïve-celebratory multiculturalism (Mansikka & Holm, 2011). Overall, Kallio-Tavin and Tavin's (2018) observation remains true that Finland "refuses to problematize the power of whiteness" and "the word *race* is hardly ever used … due to negative connotations from the Second World War" (p. 69, see also Oikarinen-Jabai, 2014). All in all, the "image of Finland as innocent and pure -disconnected from practices of colonialism, racism, and exclusion" (p. 70) makes it imperative for CWS to enter schools and other educational contexts. This article hopes to provide some lessons about implementing CWP in Finnish schools and to encourage further CW research in school and classroom settings. It was driven by one research question: What discourses of Whiteness does one White English teacher promote in the context of an English classroom of refugee-background adult learners?

Context and Methodology

The data for this study come from a larger ethnographic project at a refugee-serving school for adults in rural Finland. In this context, students who have outgrown the compulsory school system can obtain their certificate in elementary education within two years, which enables them to attend vocational or secondary schools. At the time of data collection, the school served about 80 students a year, most of whom came from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, and Syria. The larger study examined questions of linguistic legitimacy in the school and, for that purpose, collected about 200 hours of participant observations, 100 hours of classroom recordings, and 10 hours of informal conversations and open-ended interviews with students and teachers at the school.

This study focuses on one 90-minute English lesson that I taught as a substitute for the local English teacher ("Mari") in April 2017. The students, all advanced learners of Finnish, attended this English class as part of their foreign language requirement that the national Finnish curriculum stipulates. Although all of them had attended at least one year of English classes (most of them at the same school), their proficiency levels varied greatly, depending on their prior schooling and life experience. In the four months I had spent at the school as a researcher, I had noticed some anxiety around and distance to the English language among the students. This surfaced, for instance, in students refusing to use English in an effort to blend into a Finnish-dominant society and avoid being labeled as "immigrants" or in them expressing a feeling of incapability of performing socially or academically legitimate English pronunciation, grammar, and spelling. I decided to plan a lesson with the aim of problematizing linguistic ownership and empowering students to speak and claim legitimacy for their varieties of English and other languages. The lesson objectives for the students included orally sharing experiences and expressing their opinions about using English and reflecting on their relationship to English in writing. With its goal of highlighting counter-discourses to the common deficit views refugee-background adult learners often face, my class was supposed to be a contribution to a social justice-oriented approach that would help legitimize and elevate students' social status and ways of being. Following a general sense of dissatisfaction with my teaching, I used peer-supported discourse analysis of the lesson transcript to better understand my uneasiness. After several thorough readings of the transcript, I identified 12 excerpts that either contained tension or communicative breakdowns (inductive coding) and represented potential discourses of Whiteness as described above. Trying to categorize the data excerpts, I solicited comments and feedback from two "critical friends", senior colleagues and applied linguists with whom I have, over the past years, met on a regular basis for common reading, coding, and interpreting of data. With the help of their input, I decided on three themes that I then specifically looked for in the transcript (deductive coding): using discursive moves that silence students, using the non-native speaker category without reference to race, and forefronting my own experiences or knowledge.

Positionality

I am a White, middle-class, European woman and currently live in Finland, where I work at a university in a teaching and research position. Although born and raised in Central Europe, where I received my MA degree and teaching license in English as a foreign and German as a second language, I have not lived in my birth country for over a decade. After

working as a high school teacher for some years, I entered a PhD program in the area of Applied Linguistics in the Midwestern US and, after graduation, accepted a faculty position at a university in New England. About three years ago, I moved to Finland and began to work in a research, and, after that, in a senior lecturer position. My experience of living and working in the US for 7 years at a time when White people's awareness of race and racism was rising even in the predominantly White institutions where I studied and worked, has deeply shaped me. Although relatively new to CWS, through my work as teacher and teacher educator in three countries, I am not new to educating White teachers and understanding their practices and experience from a variety of viewpoints.

Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: "Adult people have an opinion."

As a first activity, I showed my students a video of second-language English speakers from various countries, including Korea, Nigeria, Iran, and Bulgaria. Afterwards I asked them to react to intentionally problematic or controversial statements about varieties of English (e.g., "US American English is the best English."). In order to indicate their agreement or disagreement (or anything in between), I invited them to position themselves physically in the classroom space between "+" (agree) and "-" (disagree). This activity was designed to practice expressing opinions and supporting them with arguments. My analysis showed that I insisted on the students expressing their opinions throughout the lesson and particularly during this activity. (Italics indicate translations from Finnish. T refers to the teacher and author, other letters to students' pseudonyms.)

Example 1
T: *I want your opinion. Do you understand?*
S: *Yes, yes.*
T: *So what is your, what is your opinion? What do you think?*

This persistent "wanting the students' opinions" continued throughout the activity. When students seemed reluctant to show where they stood (literally) or speak up in front of the whole group, I resorted to claiming that opinions were important and universal.

Example 2
T: Do you have opinions? Then your opinion is, okay. *Do you (pl.) have opinions? Do you?*
S: *We do.*
T: *You do. Good. Then show. Show me.* I, usually adult people have an opinion, you have something to say. You know what you want. You have opinions, then, yes no or maybe, *yes nor or maybe.*
D: Maybe.
T: You have an opinion right? okay. [unintel.] My, my daughter is three, she has very many opinions. okay so show me your opinion.

M: [unintel.]
T: Yes. Your opinion is yes? Okay, then you have to stand (there). Huh, okay, so American English is the best English, yes or no?
S: (No.
D: *It is.*)
T: Thank you. Yes, do you agree or disagree? Do you know what it means, agree or disagree? Agree means yes, *same opinion*, disagree means no, *different opinion*. Okay?

In several cases, when students had found their position in the room, I would ask them to defend it by responding to my question "why?".

Example 3
T: So you, Ali, you (said) everybody should speak English like in America or, (why?
A: [unintel.] Should.)
T: Why do you (think?
A: think) Americans are (great) and
T: Yes, why? Do you know?
A: Because Americans are are different, should be honest, and
T: Okay.

The process of expressing one's opinion by physically positioning oneself in the room and orally and spontaneously defending this position in the public of the classroom is highly problematic for several reasons. First, it disregards students' linguistic and social preparedness to express their opinions and speak in front of a group. Second, my assumption of universality ("Adult people have an opinion.") is not only an unverifiable generalization, operating on a narrow understanding of "opinion", and confounding opinions with willingness and ability to express them, it also displays condescension, particularly when followed up by the comment about my daughter having opinions. In no case did my "why?" produce a dialogic exploration of reasons and arguments, nor did it seem to help students form or express opinions. Rather, as the following example shows, it had the effect of silencing them.

Example 4
T: And Miriam, you also think everybody should speak American?
M: Yes.
T: Or, uhm, British? Why? Uhm.
M: *America, America.*
T: American. Why? *Why? You can speak in Finnish if you want.*
M: *Yes*.
T: Why. *Why?*
M: [unintel.]
T: *Because?*

M: Because they don't want *How they, some do and some don't.*
T: *Yes, but*
P: *Sorry, I didn't get that.*
T: *But okay* so what can *why not Chinese English?*
[...]
T: *Well tell me, tell me, why not Chinese English?*
P: *Because no they* öö *they* öö
T: *Like* öm *in the video*, why shouldn't they speak (kii-) Chinese English?
M: *Aah, I don't know.*
T: *Okay.*

In this case, the more I urged Miriam to respond to my why-questions, the less she answered, until she finally gave up. My discourse style forced her into an unresolvable situation: Although I pushed her to express a reason for her argument, I did not accept (or even try to understand) the ones she offered. Additionally, I missed an opportunity for addressing the topic of accents and varieties, and their legitimacy and stigma. I should have offered the students time and space to go through, test, and reflect on their own experiences and opinions ("Because they don't want") and make them visible and legitimate in the classroom.

The discourse in these examples was dominated by my call for opinions and arguments, which silenced my students. My power position as a teacher, White person, researcher, member of the wealthy middle class, European citizen, and academic likely all played a role in this. Although, in the end, my Whiteness cannot be disentangled from other social positions of power, for this article, I decided to focus on race. My attempts to elicit argumentative discourse from my students during this lesson stem from my own familiarity with it. Having been educated and socialized in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) from daycare to graduate school, expressing and supporting opinions has deeply shaped me and helped me succeed as a student, teacher, and researcher. My claim is not that this discourse style belongs to White people, but rather, that I am a product of an educational process in which Whiteness as well as argumentative discourse were critical components of success and wellbeing. The fact that I embody and enact both of them has to be considered to deeply understand the excerpts above. My class offered students a very narrow space to respond adequately to my questions: the space of argumentative and opinionated discourse I had been socialized into through my education in predominantly White contexts and institutions.

Expressing opinions and public argumentation are an academic genre that has sometimes, problematically, been identified as an integral part of so-called "Western" education. For example, in her study with international students from China, Durkin (2011) acknowledges the long-standing tradition of argumentative discourse, explaining that "critical debate is a defining concept in Western universities, and is rooted in the Socratic/Aristotelian pursuit and discovery of 'truth' through the disciplined process of critical thinking." (p. 274). This view is problematic as it homogenizes European education as "Socratic/Aristotelian", thereby erasing Indigenous, minoritized, and non-mainstream ways of academic thinking as

well as ignoring discourses of argumentation and debate in non-European or non-dominant communities.

When Durkin uses the term "Western" in opposition to "Chinese", it seems that she has White European or European-American contexts in mind. She points out that what she deems to be a Socratic/Aristotelian approach to academic work often ignores potential mismatches in cultural norms and values of academic discourse between those socialized in the respective universities and those educated elsewhere.

Aware of such implications, I refer to the argumentative discourse I found in my data as discourse of Whiteness. Seen in this light, my insisting on having and expressing opinions, was a colonizing act that did not, as intended, lead to student empowerment but rather reinscribed a dominant discourse pattern that I was comfortable and familiar with due to my European educational socialization at PWIs. Although their silence was likely also connected to the professional, socioeconomic, linguistic, and racial differences between us, I argue that the discourse style I had acquired throughout my educational and professional trajectory and brought into their class, was an additional factor. My argument here is not that students were unable or unwilling to engage in argumentative discourse, but rather that I narrowed down the options for participation (the legitimate discourses) in ways that were highly problematic and related to my education in White-dominant contexts.

Theme 2: "That's what we have in common."

In the discussion of so-called native speakers and non-native speakers, I used myself, the students, and their English teacher as examples, repeatedly identifying all of us as so-called "non-native speakers". While this may have helped some students understand the term, it erased all differences between me and them, many of which would have been pertinent to explore in the lesson.

> *Example 5*
> T: Where do they come from, the people [referring to a video clip featuring
>   English speakers from different countries], where do they come from?
> F: Many countries.
> T: Yes, many countries. Which countries? Uhm, what do they have in
>   common. Do you know what that means? *What do they have in common? So*
>   there's one thing that they all have, everybody has, what is it?
> S: (Language
> F: English language)
> T: Which language?
> F: English language
> T: Yes, yeah, and what about their English, we also have all that.
> F: Uhm.
> T: *Are are is their first language English?*
> S: No.
> F: *No.*

T: *Is your first language English?*

S: *No.*

F: *No.*

T: *Is my en- first language English?*

F: [unintel.] (language

T: But but but), okay so they they all, they all learn English, so they are English learners. Uhm, do you know what this word is? [writes on board] Native speaker, native speaker. *If English is your first language, then you are a* native speaker.

F: Mhm.

T: *Are the people in the movie* native speakers?

S: *No.*

T: *No. Am I* a native speaker? No. *Is Mari* [the English teacher] a native speaker?

S: *No.*

T: *So, so* nobody's native speaker okay? So no native speakers, that's what we have in common.

F: That is the second language.

T: Exactly, it's a second language. Sometimes it's a third language fourth language. So for you English is a second language, for me English is a second language, for Mari English is a second language. So most people in this world who speak English don't speak it as a first language. So most, most

R: [unintel.] second language.

H: Mhm.

R: People don't have second language -

T: Not everybody has a second language, a lot of people, uhm, speak only one language

R: Yeah but [unintel.]

T: In your class, yes, that's super, yeah. But I just wanted to note most people in this world and our planet who speak English are not native speakers okay

In this excerpt, I described the English teacher Mari, the students, the people featured in the video clip, and myself as so-called "non-native speakers". This creates the illusion that we share the same experiences, which ignores key issues in the debate of accents and language varieties, of which race, class, and citizenship would have been especially important to address in this setting. In other words, the categories of "native speaker" and "non-native speaker" and the way in which I applied those in the excerpt above did not only categorize language users along a problematic and simplistic binary, they also erased important social factors from the discussion. As Lee and Canagarajah (2019) pointed out, the categories alone perpetuate binary thinking and reduce the focus on the order of language acquisition, which is not only a fuzzy but also a potentially secondary criterion for linguistic legitimacy. Instead, it would have been important to discuss, for instance, why it is more acceptable for a White teacher like me to perform a non-native identity than for my SOC (see Shuck, 2006). As Merryfield (2000) explains, such erasure of racial difference (and the associations of race with class and educational background) is an exertion of White privilege that perpetuates

dynamics of White supremacy. Not only does it negate the experience of SOC, erasing difference also bars them from an opportunity to develop a double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903), a two-faced self that allows them to exist as both POC and legitimate members of Finnish society. Denying students this opportunity of better understanding and navigating self-society relations can result in internalization of a conflict they experience between a teacher's presentation of a unified group (e.g., so-called non-native speakers) and their own sense of not-belonging or difference. The use of simplistic categories like native-nonnative is thus not harmless as it dilutes and blurs issues of race (and other social factors) by restricting our gaze to a linguistic lens.

Theme 3: "Personally, I think ..."

In some instances, individual students took the floor and expressed their opinions and experiences. However, their opinions and experiences remained marginal during the lesson.

> *Example 6*
> O: Can I say my?
> T: Yes, obvious-, of course, great!
> O: Yeah.
> T: I'll let you, a second, oh, it's -
> O: Uhm, I think -
> T: [to another student who is texting] Hey, Ahmed, put it away, please.
> O: We have to speak like a Englishman, Englishman, but it's impossible. We can't but, uhm, we have to try.
> T: Okay. Why? Why do we have to try?
> O: We have to try this, bit, like, like, an Englishman, uhm, but I, I think it's, it's impossible
> T: I, I also think it's impossible so
> [...]
> T: Uhm, I also think, so I study languages and I can tell you that, how many, you have, if you, if you have an accent you're probably gonna have it for a long time, for probably for your life. It depends a little on everybody, but that's okay. You don't have to speak English like English people or like British people, or like American people, right? Uhm, per-personally, I think everybody should speak their own English and we can't, you, you understand me right? You understand me, you understand our conversation, I understand you, so there's no problem. Most of the time there's no problem. And when there's a problem, we can change something, but
> O: We have to try use [unintel.] conversation they try to speak with car- conversation but it's impossible, uhm that the- they can [unintel.] British, they can and speak same and like -
> T: Exactly.
> O: an Englishman.

T: Yeah. I, I agree. Yes.

T: Okay, next sentence, okay.

In this extract, Omar was asking (not for the first time) for the floor to share his perspective on speaking English. His experience of being torn or trapped between "we have to speak like an Englishman" and "it's impossible" speaks to the impossible bind racialized language ideologies put their speakers in: While there is a clear sense of having to comply with White norms (the norms of the "Englishman") (Flores and Rosa, 2015), Omar is also painfully aware that "this is impossible". Although Omar does not explicitly refer to the "Englishman" as a White person, the image of a native speaker from so-called "inner-circle" countries (Kachru, 1992) has been linked to colonialism (e.g., Pennycook, 1998), and been criticized for its (implicit) White normativity. As Kubota (2009), explains, "the superiority of the native speaker is not based purely on the linguistic attributes of individual speakers. The question of which category one belongs to is determined by a discourse that produces a certain linguistic and racialized profile as legitimate or illegitimate speakers." (p. 236) Similarly, what Leung, Harris, and Rampton (1997) have said about the UK context seems to apply also here, namely that "there is an abstracted notion of an idealised native speaker of English from which ethnic and linguistic minorities are automatically excluded" (p. 546). It is likely that this White ideal of the so-called "native speaker" has shaped Omar's image of "Englishmen" and what he has in mind when he expresses his anxiety about failing to live up to this impossible standard.

In the next extract, Leyla shared an experience of having difficulty understanding "American" accents

Example 7

T: Okay uhm and you disagree can you explain why, Leyla?

L: [unintel.] speak American) speaks

T: [to another student who is making some noise] Shh, I wanna hear this.

L: They speak, it is difficult, and don't understand.

T: (yeah

L: the) conversation

T: Yeah, so that is a really good point. So for example, one person from Taiwan, one person from Iraq, one person from India, and one person from Thailand come together and you speak English. Everything is okay. Okay? Imagine in your heads. So the four people from different countries come and speak English. American person comes, what happens?

A: They can't understand them.

T: Yeah, so that's often that the thing is that sometimes, we understand what we say because English is our second language, and then when the native speakers come, sometimes they don't understand us and we don'tunderstand them but we understand each other, so that's really interesting I think. So sometimes the native speakers don't help because they don'tunderstand and we don't understand them. Okay, okay. Thank you. Sit down.

Also in this exchange, rather than offering Leyla an opportunity to expand on her experience, I reacted by tapping my own knowledge and following up her comment with a mini-lecture on so-called native and non-native accents.

Both examples illustrate a discourse of Whiteness that was particularly powerful in silencing my students. The impossibility Omar expresses in example 6 relates to what Flores and Rosa (2015a, 2015b) have called a "white listening subject", a normative hegemonic listener whose expectations demand compliance with White linguistic norms but will not allow for racialized learners to actually meet those. Omar's argument speaks to the experience of failure such dynamics set SOC up for. However, his sharing of such struggles did not receive the space it deserves in my lesson. Instead of allowing Omar to explore the injustice he was experiencing, I cut him off with a statement of my own opinion. In fact, in both examples, I reacted to students' shared experiences by drawing on my academic background and referring, albeit indirectly, to research I was aware of, for instance on the difficulty of modifying an accent (Long, 1990) or the legitimacy of so-called "non-native" (or English as a lingua franca) users of English (Seidlhofer, 2004). In the brief exchange with Leyla, she opened up about her difficulty of understanding "American" accents, which I revoiced and redirected into a mini-lecture about communication breakdowns between first and second language users, to which I discouraged reactions by ending the activity. Both of my explications received a lot more space in the exchanges as well as additional weight through their position as the final argument at the end of the exchange. In responding to a personal experience with a (covertly) academic move, I reinforced the traditional hegemonic hierarchies of academic knowledge versus personal experience.

As Solórzano (1997) pointed out, one of the five themes of CRT is the centrality and legitimacy of POC's "experiential knowledge" (p. 7) as it is captured for instance in stories and other narrative accounts. Elsewhere (2019), he reaffirmed the importance of teachers focusing on the "lived experiences of Students of Color" (p. 108). Despite my intention of offering an empowering lesson for students to share their experiences and opinions, the extracts above clearly show that the opposite happened. Rather than foregrounding student experiences and stories, I used them as a springboard for making my own points, which suggests that this activity, although on the surface maybe about students' experiences and knowledge, was in fact about mine. It is important to point to the larger implications of this discursive delegitimation of SOC's experience by a White teacher. When students' experiences receive a response or reframing through an "academic" explanation, they are delegitimized not only as students' stories, but also as narratives that do not hold up against perceived White notions of scientific argumentation and knowledge. Not the experience or story, but its overlay in arguments of so-called "Western" or White academic logic becomes the central part of the discourse, so that delegitimation does not only happen on the individual level, but also perpetuates and reinscribes larger societal dynamics of oppression. In this way, the discourse I displayed reinscribed the dominance of the White listening subject.

Conclusions and implications

My analysis showed that in my class, I engaged in discourses of Whiteness that pushed students to express and defend their opinions in ways that were not conducive to

learning and potentially threatening to their identities. Other discourse of Whiteness erased differences between them and me, limited their space for sharing experiences, and privileged White logic over students' narratives. All of these findings point to oppressive dynamics being in place in the classroom as well as on a greater societal level, and may occur in similar settings. In an effort to avoid the trap of replacing a White teacher's confession with anti-racist action (Lensmire et al., 2013), each of the findings feeds into a concrete recommendation for White teachers and teachers educators like myself who serve SOC. In addition to the ideas below, I understand this study as an invitation to all White teachers to closely and critically look at their and each other's classroom discourses, practices, and to begin to understand themselves as a "subject of struggle" that pushes toward social justice through personal and societal transformation.

Embrittling Eurocentric teaching norms

As a teacher who received her education in PWIs in Europe and North America, it is difficult to underestimate how deeply entrenched Eurocentric thinking and doing is in me. There is no single strategy or activity that can overcome such a long-grown worldview, but several smaller steps can be taken towards embrittling and at some point dismantling it. In line with research that calls for White teachers practicing self-reflection within their sociopolitical and institutional context (Arsenault, 2018), the following questions offer impetus for White teachers to de-normalize our worldview by considering our educational trajectories, knowledge, and ways of knowing and reimagining our students' identities and the societal contexts in which we work and live.

- About myself: What is my educational trajectory? Who/what has shaped what I know and believe about education and particularly learning English? What about this is due to my racial, linguistic, cultural background? What other ways of knowing and learning are there than my own?
- About my lessons and syllabi: What learners do I (implicitly) envision? How are their motivations for learning English different from mine? What knowledge/beliefs/values do I presume? How do those relate to race, gender, class, and other social factors? What other learners are there than the ones I have imagined?
- About the larger societal context I work in: What discourses exist about education? (In Finland, these include educational excellence and educational neutrality.) What discourses exist about learning or using English? Who is the imagined learner of the curriculum? Who is struggling or failing to learn (English) and what aspects of schooling cause, expedite, or allow that to happen?

Putting such reflective processes in place will likely require a lot of reading, learning, conversation, observation, and peer support. Giving teachers space, time, and guidance (e.g., peer mentoring, professional learning communities (PLCs), or critical friends groups) to do such "honest yet painfully-critical self-reflection" (Matias & Mackey, 2016, p. 35) is an essential component of Critical Whiteness Pedagogies (Matias & Mackey, 2016). Resources are also needed to turn reflection into sustainable action that transform discourse of

Whiteness into anti-racist pedagogies. My hope is that we will be able to build spaces into our everyday teacher routine that facilitate our unlearning (e.g. of tailoring our instruction to those that are like us) and learning (e.g. of teaching English for social change) and that institutions will support these processes with appropriate resources for the benefit and safety of our students.

Acknowledging difference and privilege

Especially when teaching students with refugee experience, it is important to learn practices of advocacy without patronizing and practices of solidarity without erasing difference. While writing a lesson or unit plan, a set of self-critical questions can serve to detect potential mitigation or erasure of difference and privilege, for example:

- Noticing difference: What is it about my life experience that makes the lesson's/unit's content and use of language (English) interesting to me? How does this differ from my students' interest in them? What are the roots of this difference?
- Addressing difference: How will my lesson/unit address this difference explicitly and provide space for students to process and express how (or if) they experience it?

Such questions do not have to serve solely as a reflective exercise for the teacher but can also be the starting point of a discussion with the students. In teacher education contexts, where identity-oriented approaches have been popular and made important contributions, it is time to put more emphasis on such alterity-based pedagogies that allow conversations about difference. Matias and Mackey (2016) have noted that exposing White teachers to a variety of experiences of and texts from POC is a critical part of CWP. Particularly when the learners are adults, the impression of the White teacher as a role model can easily be conveyed (even unintentionally). Instead, acknowledgment of privilege and difference can help learners find their own approach and build a double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) for learning and using English.

Centerstaging students' varied life experience

Acknowledging refugee students' experience is a challenging and critical task for teachers of SOC, especially when they have enjoyed the privilege of a life guarded by Whiteness and White educational norms. How do we as White teachers centerstage the varied experience of students with refugee background in ways that avoid retraumatization, acknowledge potentially interrupted schooling, are conducive to learning, and engage rather than alienate or silence students? Pedagogical approaches exist that build learning around learners and their communities, such as community-based learning and service learning (Cooper, 2007; Farnsworth, 2010), or forefront students' multimodal narratives (e.g., Reyes Torres, Pinch Ponce, & García Pastor, 2012 for the EFL context). Such frameworks can serve to understand adult learners' multicultural, multilingual, and multiliterate lives and utilize them to build content and language that is not based on White experience.

In all, my suggestion is to meet our students before we design our curriculum. Too often, students enter an educational system, where much has already been decided for them but without them: the curriculum, the materials, the assessments, to name a few. In teacher education, we prepare future teachers to be prepared, to break curriculum goals down into instruction, and to have an array of methods handy for use. What if instead, we prepared teachers to come a little less prepared and meet their students ready to ask, listen, and learn? What if we cultivated the un(der)prepared teacher who is courageous enough to leave spaces to be filled with students' stories, interests, needs, and goals, not the demands of the (White-dominated) school, curriculum, or economy?

Author bio

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