San Jose State University
SJSU ScholarWorks

Faculty Publications African-American Studies

January 2005

Being and living in research: A discussion on cultural experience and cultural identity as referents in knowledge production

Theodorea Berry
The University of Illinois at Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/afam_pub

Part of the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

Theodorea Berry. "Being and living in research: A discussion on cultural experience and cultural identity as referents in knowledge production" *Journal of Thought* (2005): 27-41.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the African-American Studies at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.

Being and Living in Research:

A Discussion on Cultural Experience and Cultural Identity as Referents in Knowledge Production

Theodorea Regina Berry
University of Illinois at Chicago

The Research

As we begin to journey through this new 21st century, schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDEs) are endeavoring to meet the challenge of preparing (future) teachers to be responsive to the educational needs of their students. This is especially true in relationship to the education of students of diverse backgrounds (Ladson-Billings 2001; 1999; 1994) in urban educational settings. Education for diversity has become an important consideration in curriculum and pedagogy for colleges/universities, state boards of education, school districts, and agencies including NCATE. This is further complicated by the fact that the majority of students entering the teaching profession are White and female.

> The prospective teacher population is ... predominantly white. The enrollment of schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDEs) in the late 1990s was about 495,000. Of these, 86 percent were white; about 7 percent were African American; about 3 percent were Latino. The number of Asian-Pacific Islander and American Indian-Alaskan Native students enrolled in SCDEs is negligible. (Ladson-Billings 2001, p. 4)

In 2000, 108,168 students earned degrees in education (National Center of Educational Statistics). Of these, 82,044 were women, 69,894 were White women and 21,922 were White men. These numbers are staggering next to the increasing numbers of non-White students in America's public schools. Just these numbers indicate a potential cultural gap

between most teachers and their students. Do these White teachers' cultural experiences lend themselves not only to teach but also reach their diverse student populations? If not, are we, as teacher-educators, preparing our mostly White teaching force to teach diverse student populations?

As a teacher-educator preparing my students, including/especially White students, to teach diverse student populations, first, I have to gain access to and create understandings of the cultural experiences of our teacher education students. The understandings of these cultural experiences will, at minimum, give me a glimpse of my students' cultural identities; "white Americans also have a cultural identity" (Robinson 1999, p. 88). I propose to accomplish this through the use of educational autobiographies, students' stories of schooling experiences. Autobiography in the classroom is not a new phenomenon (Graham 1991; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds 1994; Miller 1998; Schubert & Ayers 1992). Researchers have incorporated autobiographies for various reasons toward the goal of education. "Narrative has the power not just to change the teller-writer but to affect the listener-reader as well" (Garrod, Ward, Robinson, Kilkenny 1999, p. xv).

Secondly, I propose to incorporate educational autobiographies through the praxis of engaged pedagogy (hooks 1994). In this way, I, as teacher-educator/researcher, can model a praxis that may demonstrate some level of understandings of my students' cultural experiences toward the goal of teacher education. Subsequently, I endeavor to create intersections within teacher preparation, teaching practice and autobiography with critical reflection as the tool by which intersections may occur. In this way, I intend to model a praxis my students' deem worthy of emulation and that I, as teacher-educator/researcher, can examine in an attempt to address two questions in this ongoing research: (1) What happens to my practice, as teacher-educator, when I incorporate the educational autobiographies of prospective teachers planning to teach African American students in an urban area into the classroom experience and (2) how, if at all, does exposure to the use of educational autobiography in engaged pedagogy affect students' subsequent teaching practice?

Two principal subjects will be the focus of this study: the teacher-educator/researcher and her students. To date, several issues/topics have surfaced from the data: relationship (building) between teacher and student, stories as tool for teaching, teacher's critical reflection, literature for teaching diversity, social studies for teaching diversity, co-teaching and collaboration, alternative feedback for teaching, alternative versus/and traditional evaluation for teaching, cultural identity, and cultural experience.

But, why is cultural identity and cultural experience important in the

teaching practice of teacher-educators of White students who will teach diverse student populations (primarily African American students) in urban school settings? How might the cultural identities and cultural experiences of the White student-teacher affect their (future) (African American) students? How does the cultural identity and cultural experience of the teacher-educator affect the students? How does knowledge of the students' cultural identity and cultural experience influence engaged pedagogy of the teacher-educator/researcher? What knowledge can be produced by the teacher-educator/researcher when cultural identity and cultural experience are utilized as central referents of the research?

In this paper, I will first discuss cultural identity and cultural experience, autobiography and engaged pedagogy. Then, I will address two questions: (1) How does knowledge of the students' cultural identity and cultural experience affect engaged pedagogy of the teacher-educator/researcher and (2) What knowledge can be produced by the teacher-educator/researcher when cultural identity and cultural experience are utilized as central referents of the research? The four topics and the two questions will be addressed in the context of the researcher's on-going study.

Cultural Identity and Cultural Experience

Experiences occur within the context of a variety of socio-cultural venues and have the significant potential of shaping one's identities. My past experiences as an African American female teacher-educator at a historically Black university (Berry 2002a) have continuously shaped my present experiences in a predominantly white institution. As a result, this has re-affirmed my belief that identity is not a static, but rather a socio-dynamic, racialized, and historical construct. Robinson (1999) places identity as "multiple, textured, and converging" (p. 98) pointing out that "race ... alone does not constitute all of one's attitudes, experiences, and cognitions related to the self" (p. 98); however, race can be a dominant identity most influential in our experiences (Robinson 1999). As such, it can inform new experiences.

Robinson (1999) defines identity as "both visible and invisible domains of the self that influence self-construction. They include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and physical and intellectual ability" (p. 85). Taylor (1999) defines cultural identity "as one's understanding of the multilayered, interdependent, and nonsynchronous interaction of social status, language, race, ethnicity, values, and behaviors that permeate and influence nearly all aspects of our lives" (p. 232). All of these factors influence the way we see the world and inform our experiences.

For African Americans, our experiences and identities have served as part of a binary construct in a dichotomous relationship to those identified as White. As "involuntary immigrants" (Castenell and Pinar 1993, p. 4), our experiences and identities have taken place solely in socio-cultural venues constructed and dominated by White people, even in those venues solely visibly occupied by African Americans. As an African American woman teaching in a predominantly White institution, my race became my dominant identity. But instead of resisting this singularity placed upon me, I utilized it in performing engaged pedagogy. Race was the dominant factor in the educational autobiography I presented to the class (Berry 2002b) before students were required to submit their own. Race was the dominant factor in the poetry I presented for an elementary grades literature curriculum. Race was the dominant factor in the songs we discussed. My gender, ethnicities, sexual orientation were secondary; regardless of class, gender, nationality, language or sexual orientation, race has often surfaced as a dominant factor toward influencing our/my experiences.[1]

For White Americans, experiences and identities have served as the model for all "other" Americans. And although "white Americans also have a racial identity ... it is rare that a white person has an experience that causes them to assess their attitudes about being a racial being" (Robinson 1999, p.88). It is rare that White Americans have and/or take the opportunity to "address the ways in which their culture influenced their beliefs and actions toward others" (Taylor 1999, p. 242).

School and its primary components/activities—curriculum, teaching, and learning—is a major socio-cultural venue from which our experiences and identities are (re)invented, racialized, and remembered. That shouldn't be surprising considering that many of us were required to attend school for at least12 years of our lives, 180 days each year for approximately six hours each day. For all Americans in school, there is a certain way to be, a certain way to act and react, a certain way to live. However, for African Americans these ways of being and living in this place and space often, if not always, do not coincide with the ways African American students live within their cultural communities. So, for many of those hours, days and years, African American students may be suffering in identity crisis. The curriculum of this teacher education classroom provided opportunities for students to investigate ways in which they were able to come to begin to know their (future) students' cultural communities. Students were introduced to community mapping, student book projects, school community walks, and learning centers with diverse contexts. In each of these and other projects, exercises, and discussions, student-teachers could access the cultural communities of their students thereby learning more about their students. Teachers

whose future teaching practices are affected by their coming to know the cultural identities and experiences of their students may, in turn, have students who are less likely and less often experiencing identity crisis.

Within our cultural communities, African Americans are keenly aware of our contributions to this country. It was the backs, arms, and hands of our ancestors that built this country (Robinson, 2000). Emerging scholarship, oral histories shared at family and community gatherings, informal scholar dialogues, and formal meetings and conferences have enriched our cultural identities ... as such we create experiences that are invaluable to who we are, our identities.

In this day of increasing numbers of White, mostly female, teachers in public schools, educators must find it imperative to link these experiences to students' school lives in order to strengthen and honor the cultural identities developed, formulated, and affirmed in the cultural communities of their students. In order to do this, these White teachers must come to understand who they are within the socio-cultural venue of school. Maintaining a eurocentric character of school not only denies role models to non-White students but also denies self-understanding to White teachers. I argue that to teach without knowing your students limits how much you truly know about yourself as teacher and, thus, limits how well you can teach your students. Having the multiple, complex perspectives and experiences of your students as a central part of the classroom curriculum may have the affect of challenging and enhancing what you know and how you know it. Knowing your students means knowing their stories.

And, indeed, there are multiple stories, especially in school stories, for our identities create such multiples. White students/teachers have multiple and intersecting identities in their school stories. African American students, indeed, have multiple stories not only because we exist within multiple and intersecting identities but also because at least one of these identities carries with it the historical burden of oppression. As educators, we are obligated to create spaces where we can gain access to and stand "in the presence of others' lived experiences" (Garrod, et.al. 1999, p. xvii).

Autobiography/Memoir

Autobiography has served as a tool for knowledge construction within a host of theoretical frameworks within education to include, but not limited to, critical race theory, critical race feminism, feminist theory, post-colonial issues, and post-structuralist theory. Storytelling forms such as biography, autobiography, life stories, personal narratives, and memoirs are abundant in educational research.

Autobiography, life histories, life narratives, and personal narratives

have been used in educational research in a variety of topics (Griffiths 1995). It has been useful in the examination of teaching practice (Anderson 1988; Ayers 2001a; Britzman 1991; Delpit 1995; Foster 1997; Gay 2000; Henry 1998; Ladson-Billings 1994; Miller 1990; Ritchie and Wilson 2000), teacher education programs (Knowles and Holt-Reynolds 1994; Ladson-Billings 2001; Ritchie and Wilson 2000) and students' educational experiences (Anderson 1988; Cooper 1989; Garrod, Ward, Robinson, and Kilkenny 1999; Nieto 2000). Many of these and other studies have focused on the students' educational experiences in concert with their cultural identity and experiences. The construction and revealment of a personal story includes a myriad of experiences that are influential in the (re)development/shaping of one's identity.

In this study, the term memoir will be used in lieu of autobiography. Preference for the use of this term is based on two components that precede the telling of one's story: recall and revealment.

Recall, for the purpose of this study, in relationship to memoir focuses on what the writer remembers as well as how well the writer remembers. In memoir, revealment asserts intentional or unintentional selection of what is recorded or told. Memoir, therefore, is what the writer chooses to tell based upon memory.

But, as Ayers (2001b) cautions, memory is a motherfucker. What we recall is purely in context. Memories are not isolated segments that can be pulled out from the emotional, historical, racialized, gendered, spiritual time and space in which they occur. To be able to place all of these factors onto a page and have each and every reader feel the intended impact and receive the intended message would be the mere creation of a miracle. Kelly (1997) provides a cautionary note regarding memoir:

> ... unproblematic or romantic notions of the power of story and/or the educationally redemptive powers of auto/biography—even where applauded by those whose agendas might appear more radical—must be approached cautiously, for notions are never innocent ... The caveat holds: to tell one story is to silence others; to present one version of self is to withhold other versions of self. (p. 50-51)

Kelly (1997) provides special attention to the use of such memoirs in education by "members of socially marginalized groups" (p. 51). Memoir has provided a means by which such groups can expose and/or reveal social and political oppression from a historical perspective. However, by placing in view a particular self in a prominent position, the writer not only silences another version of self but also potentially essentializes one's identity. As stated earlier, an individual's identity is multiple, intersecting, and socio-dynamic and, as Kelly (1997) clearly recognizes,

this creates multiple stories. I was concerned about such essentialization when I decided to present my educational autobiography to the class. I wondered if my students, especially my white students, would see the multiplicities of me through this story. It was through our class discussion that followed the reading of this story that we, together, were able to deconstruct the identity issues with/in school in the story I presented. I was compelled to make my story accessible, to make myself vulnerable, in order to teach about the multiplicities and complexities of self and school.

Engaged Pedagogy

bell hooks (1994) speaks eloquently about the process of teaching students "in a manner that respects and cares for" (p. 13) their souls as opposed to "a rote, assembly-line approach" (p. 13). In her interpretive approach to hooks' work on engaged pedagogy, Florence (1998) views this respect and caring as a tool toward inclusivity and caring as an acknowledgement and appreciation of difference. Only in this way can "educators ... give students the education they desire and deserve ..." (hooks as cited in Florence 1998, p. 88).

Life experiences, when permitted into the classroom and given voice, can call to task the established or official knowledge (Apple 2000) generated and perpetuated in education. This voice, which hooks speaks of frequently (1984, 1989, 1990, 1994), has the potential to move professors/teachers from a 'safe' place of lecture and invited response to a place of resistance (Florence 1998) thereby challenging the "implications of equating white middle/upper class male experience and cultural histories to a national cultural heritage"(Florence 1998, p. 96).

As a contrast to the 'safe' place of lecture and invited response, hooks (1994) moves to a place of resistance as she espouses an engaged pedagogy: "a progressive, holistic education ... more demanding than critical or feminist pedagogy"(p. 15). hooks advocates an education that goes beyond the classroom (Florence 1998) and relates to them as whole human beings. Beyer (as cited in Florence, 1998) suggests that this may mean including elements of popular culture in the classroom experience. This facilitates classroom discussion that allows students to interject many facets of their complex lived experiences into the curriculum. From this position, students and professors/teachers can free themselves into an engaged pedagogy that is holistic and progressive incorporating passion, dialogue and interaction.

There are those who disagree. There are those who question and challenge the use of dialogue and interaction in the classroom experience. Ellsworth's (1989) work, which is a critique of critical pedagogy, addresses a need for something more demanding than critical ... peda-

gogy. In *Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy*, Ellsworth (1989) identifies the need for teachers/teacher-educators to "criticize and transform her or his own understanding in response to the understandings of students" (p. 300). Ellsworth contends that by moving critical pedagogy to lived experiences placed into current reality, teachers and teacher-educators can begin to deconstruct the perceived empowerment gained from such a classroom experience. In this way "students would be empowered by social identities that affirmed their race, class and gender positions ..." (Ellsworth 1989, p. 300). She seems to suggest that focusing on the understandings of students through their lived experiences detracts from the political singularity of critical pedagogy. In other words, the teacher/teacher-educator is no longer the sole provider of empowerment. The content/material of what is learned becomes affirmed by the students' experiences. Such valuation "redistribute[es] power to students" (p. 306), delineates "the socially constructed and legitimated authority that teachers/professors hold over students" (p. 306) and understands that students' lived experiences provide dimensions of knowledge into the classroom that the teacher/professor could not know "better" than the student. However, "to assert multiple perspectives ... is not to draw away from the distinctive realities and oppressions of any particular group" (p. 323). Creating a space for multiple perspectives is in no way designed to oversimplify or homogenize any one's experiences regarding oppression and conflict in the classroom. Rather, it may facilitate the valuation of multiple ways to experience. hooks' (1994) engaged pedagogy allows for students' lived experiences to facilitate their understandings, thereby creating an understanding for teacher/teacher-educator. Ellsworth and hooks appear to agree on these points.

A key tool in hooks' engaged pedagogy that facilitates this experience is dialogue. This is where hooks and Ellsworth distinctly depart from one another. hooks' engaged pedagogy incorporates passions, dialogue and interaction through the entrance of lived experiences. Ellsworth has identified dialogue "as a fundamental imperative of critical pedagogy" (p. 314) with rules that include the assumptions that all members have equal opportunity to speak, all members respect members' rights to speak and feel safe to speak ..." (p. 314). However, among other problems, she feels that critical pedagogy does not alleviate the historical power of the teacher/professor and thereby can limit the freedom of speech in the classroom setting. hooks does not address this dilemma in her engaged pedagogy in this way. Ellsworth refers to this as a problem of "the students' and professor's asymmetrical positions of difference and privilege" (p. 315). In hooks' engaged pedagogy, there is a failure to address

these asymmetrical positions and the issues of difference and privilege (or lack thereof) that accompany them. As a result, what also does not get specifically addressed in hooks' en gaged pedagogy is how privilege and difference may silence such dialogue.

However, hooks (1994) does approach this issue differently. Engaged pedagogy warrants the vulnerability of the teacher/professor via revealment of personal lived experiences in connection with the subject. In fact, hooks insist that initial revealment come from the teacher/professor, facilitating movement from that safe place to a place of resistance. In this view of engaged pedagogy, it may be assumed that such revealment by the teacher/professor is a comfortable position from which to operate in the traditional space of the classroom. This may be true for hooks; however, hooks does not address issues of comfort or ease for others attempting to move into this position. Critical pedagogy, as presented by Ellsworth (1989), presents dialogue as an entrance to multiple perspectives. But critical pedagogy places the responsibility on the students to gain the empowerment as it is assumed that it is freely provided by the teacher. It also places the point of vulnerability on the student as a means of effective dialogue, thus, accentuating the problem as presented by Ellsworth, regarding difference and privilege. In other words, if the student doesn't reveal their oppression, the dialogue, if any, isn't effective. By contrast, hooks' engaged pedagogy insists the teacher/professor initiate and continue to participate in such revealment as a means of effective dialogue. And although there is no guarantee that the teacher/professor acknowledges and relinquishes any privilege, teacher/professor vulnerability via revealment has the potential to shift the power relationship. This has the potential to have a positive effect on how the asymmetrical positions of difference and privilege play out in the classroom. The possibility of change in the power relationship between teacher/professor and student(s) via teacher/professor revealment has the potential to change the way teacher education is conceptualized. In this view of engaged pedagogy, the teacher/professor must be critically thought-full about shifts in power and privilege via vulnerability within the classroom curriculum.

The Responses: Cultural Identity, Cultural Experience, and Knowledge Production through Engaged Pedagogy

Research can be a strange yet intriguing endeavor. It requires us to know something, to start with a premise. Even in qualitative research,

we have to know something to want to know something else, to inquiry and ask questions.

In my research, my knowing came from my experiences. I knew that five of the six teachers I had from kindergarten to fifth grade, 1968 to 1974, were African American women but from sixth grade to ninth grade most of my teachers were White women. I knew that three of the teachers I had during my high school career at an all-girls college preparatory public high school were African American women (I also had four White men and one African American man for teachers during this time). I knew that most of my college professors in undergraduate school, even at a historically Black college, were men. I knew that all except one of my professors in my doctoral program were White women (the other was a White man). This was enough to start the wondering.

Why is this important, anyway? Well, it goes back to the things I know. You see, when I was having trouble learning to read and write in first grade, it was an African American female teacher who spent time with me during recess, lunch and after school toward supporting the efforts of my parents to help me to learn. Have you ever had children laugh at you because you couldn't read? It was this very same teacher who would discover my vocal talent. When I was getting into fights in school and no one would sit with me during lunchtime, it was my third grade teacher who allowed me to bring my lunch to the classroom and we would eat together. It was my fourth grade teacher who got me interested in modern dance and science. And when I wrote the story of my (short) life, entitled *Who I Am*, to complete an assignment, it was my fifth grade teacher who recommended me for the city's academically talented program and changed the direction of my life. Now, I was the smart girl who could read, and write, and sing, and dance.

But, how were they able to do these things? How did they know what to do? I suspect that, in part, it was because we were not only members of the same geographic community (these were the days that teachers lived in the school community) but we were also members of the same cultural community. We were members of a geographically and ideologically cohesive group of people who shared racial, ethnic, national, linguistic, and social ties. We shared values and beliefs. As a result, I suspect, it was not difficult for these teachers to come to know their students and incorporate this knowing, intentionally and/or unintentionally, into their practice.

But time passes, things change and, sometimes, the lessons of our lives become faded memories. For a while, perhaps those stories don't get told. And, other times, we are given the opportunity to re-visit those lessons from a different perspective. I was given such an opportunity

while living in Germany working with the Department of Defense Dependent Schools-Europe (DoDDS). As a member of this school system's continental advisory board, one of the tasks required was the placement of student teachers coming to Germany from U.S. institutions of higher education. I wondered two things. First, why were most of these student teachers White women? Second, why were most of the collaborating teachers White women? In my wondering, I did some research and I learned that many of these collaborating teachers worked in the system for 15 or more years and about one-third were retirement eligible. I also learned that recruitment efforts for teaching positions on the U.S. continent were designated for predominantly White institutions. Finally, I discovered that the numbers of non-White students in DoD schools in Europe had increased by 20 percent in the last seven years. It was at this point that my involvement with the DoDDS-Europe schools shifted to issues of diversity.

Another opportunity arose when I moved to Chicago for graduate school. To my good fortune, I acquired a position on the ethnographic research team of a major research project examining the impact on the culture of public high schools involved in major school reform. I was assigned to conduct my research in a high school where the majority of the faculty were African American women. But, when I looked again, many of these women were seasoned veterans. I wondered who would replace them when they decided to retire.

After reading Lisa Delpit's (1995) text, my observations gained additional clarity. Few women of color with the opportunity to enter college were choosing teaching as a profession due to, among other reasons, their experiences in school. Of those, many failed to commence teaching after graduation due to their experiences in teacher education; teacher educators did not value what these students, through their cultural experiences, brought to the collegiate classroom.

From this point, I decided to utilize hooks' engaged pedagogy (1994) to incorporate students' lives into the curriculum. But, how would I initiate access into their lives? Educational autobiographies became the tool by which I would enter into the students' worlds. It would be through these stories that I would begin to know, to gain knowledge of, students' cultural experiences and cultural identity.

How is knowledge of the students' cultural identity and experience important to engaged pedagogy? As mentioned earlier, access to information about the students' cultural identity and experiences came from their educational autobiographies. These stories of the students' schooling experience were constructed without any prescribed guidelines regarding content or form; students could choose to include or exclude

any information. I read and reflected upon each story and, oftentimes, I found connections to my own schooling experiences, related literature and/or curriculum content of the course. In my engaged pedagogy, I found ways to 'pay attention to' what the students were saying in their stories. For instance, one White female student revealed that she found school to be boring most of the time and often found herself drifting off in class; constant lecturing did not keep her attention. As a result, I made a conscious effort to do less talking and more listening. I emphasize the need to hear the students' voices.

Knowledge of the students' cultural identity and experiences served well in like manner. One Mexican-American female student revealed in her educational autobiography that she was learning English while in elementary school and teachers in her school did not like the children to speak Spanish in school, even in casual conversation. Additionally, her parents held her teachers in high regard and disagreeing with the teacher was considered disrespectful. As a result, she did not speak much in class during her K-12 school years. I noticed that she didn't speak very much during our class sessions. The few times she spoke, her words were insightful and thoughtful. I wanted her to have the desire to say more, to share what she thought. But, I didn't want her to feel uncomfortable by placing my values and beliefs on her. I had to learn to accept how school has socialized her and found other ways, such as small group conversations and in-class writings, to have her share her thoughts and ideas.

Information on the students' cultural identity and experiences in school informed my engaged pedagogy and focused upon the values and beliefs learned through the students' cultural communities that were shaped by the experiences in these communities that formulated/ developed their cultural identities. I, as teacher-educator/research gained a great deal from an engaged pedagogy initially accessed by students' educational autobiographies.

When cultural identity and experiences serve as central referents of the research, stereotypical ideology regarding issues of race, ethnicity, nationality, language, sexual orientation, class and gender must be removed. I found that even as a self-proclaimed liberal-minded, educated, well-traveled person, there was much I didn't know. This is due to the complexities and multiplicities of identity and experiences, respectively. As much as I recognized that my students viewed me by my dominant identity, I, too, often viewed my students by what I perceived to be their dominant identity. This singularity left out much there was to know about my students. By using educational autobiographies as a means to access and address an engaged pedagogy, I was better able to see the multiplicity of my students thereby discovering

and/or inventing new ways to teach based on the cultural experiences of my students.

Cultural identity and experiences as central referents of the research re-affirmed my belief that "white Americans also have a racial identity" (Robinson 1999, p. 88). But this re-affirmation was not available through the White students educational autobiographies but through those of the non-White students in this class. Stories recalled and shared by students of color often revealed their schooling experiences in opposition to or conflict with racial and ethnic ways of being and knowing they had experienced outside of their school lives. The stories of these students of color often revealed attempts to "fit in" or "be more like them" which I interpreted as code for assimilating into White, mainstream American. Becoming solidified in this belief urged me to find ways, through engaged pedagogy, to help all of my students "assess their attitudes about being a racial being" (p. 88). In an alternative literary discussion on social studies and respect using Aretha Franklin's popular song, White and non-White students alike were able to assess the relationships between cultural knowledge and respect through a social studies curriculum.

Using cultural identity and experiences as central referents of research provided a myriad of factors to examine for knowledge production. This is largely as a result of the multilayered, complex nature of identity and experience.

Notes

[1] I wish to extend my gratitude to Steve Tozer for feedback on an earlier version of this article.

[2] Research by Theodorea Regina Berry described herein is supported by a postdoctoral fellowship from the American Educational Research Association/ Institute for Education Sciences.

References

Anderson, James D. (1988). *The education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935.* Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Apple, Michael W. (2000). *Official knowledge: Democratic education in a conservative age* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Ayers, William. (2001a). *To teach: The journey of a teacher.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Ayers, William. (2001b). *Fugitive days: A memoir.* New York: Beacon Press.

Berry, Theodorea R. (2002a). *Songs and stories: Lyrical movements in teaching and learning of an African American woman.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation. National-Louis University.

Berry, Theodorea R. (2002b). The problem of being me. *Narratives* 7(1):10-14.

Britzman, Deborah. 1991. *Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Castenell, Jr., Louis A. & Pinar, William F., eds. (1993). Introduction. Pp. 1-30. In *Understanding curriculum as racial text: Representations of identity and difference in education.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Cooper, Arnold. (1989). *Between struggle and hope: Four Black educators in the South*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.

Delpit, Lisa. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom.* New York: New Press.

Ellsworth, Elizabeth. (1989). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review* 59(3): 297-324.

Florence, Namulundah. (1998). *bell hooks' engaged pedagogy: A transgressive education for critical consciousness*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Foster, Michelle. (1997). *Black teachers on teaching.* New York: New Press.

Gay, Geneva. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Garrod, Andrew, Ward, Janie V., Robinson, Tracy L. & Kilkenny, Robert, eds. (1999). *Souls looking back: Life stories of growing up Black.* New York: Routledge.

Griffiths, Morwenna. (1995). (Auto) biography and epistemology. *Educational Review* 47(1): 75-88.

Henry, Annette. (1998). *Taking back control: African Canadian women teachers' lives and practice*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

hooks, bell. (1984). *Feminist theory: From margin to center.* Boston: South End Press.

hooks, bell. (1989). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking Black.* Boston: South End Press.

hooks, bell. (1990). *Yearning: Race, gender and cultural politics*. Boston: South End Press.

hooks, bell. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom.* New York: Routledge.

Kelly, Ursula. (1997). *Schooling desire: Literacy, cultural politics and pedagogy.* New York: Routledge.

Knowles, J.Gary & Holt-Reynolds, Diane. (1994). An introduction: Personal histories as medium, method, and milieu for gaining insights into teacher development. *Teacher Education Quarterly* 21(1): 5-12.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Murrell, Jr., P.C. (1999). Class and race in negotiating identity. Pp. 3-14. In *Souls looking back: Life stories growing up Black*. Edited by A. Garrod, J.V. Ward, T.L. Robinson & R. Kilkenny. New York: Routledge.

Miller, Janet L. (1990). *Creating spaces and finding voices: Teachers collaborating*

for empowerment. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
Nieto, Sonia. (2000). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (3rd ed.). New York: Longman.
Ritchie, Joy S. & Wilson, David E. (2000). *Teacher narrative as critical inquiry: Rewriting the script*. New York: Teachers College Press.
Robinson, Randall. (2000). *The debt: What America owes to Blacks*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
Robinson, Tracy L. (1999). The intersections of identity. Pp. 85-98. In *Souls looking back: Life stories of growing up Black*. Edited by A. Garrod, J.V. Ward, T.L. Robinson & R. Kilkenny. New York: Routledge.
Taylor, Edward. (1999). Lessons for leaders: Using critical inquiry to promote identity development. Pp.231-244. In *Racial and ethnic identity in school practices: Aspects of human development*. Edited by R.H. Sheets & E.R. Hollins. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Copyright of Journal of Thought is the property of Caddo Gap Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.