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## A paradigm shift in education: pedagogy, standpoint and ethics of care

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores how ethics of care informs pedagogical practices in schools. Ethics of care is located within social constructivism that centralises a student centred approach to learning. In so doing, teachers engage students in learning within a relationship of reciprocity. This paper examines the ways in which social reproduction is maintained through normative ethics of care practices that is positioned as culturally neutral in schools. This paper argues for a critical examination of how the teaching/learning nexus is informed by and constrained within the paradigm of white ethics of care in education. There is a particular focus on Indigenous students' "positionality" in the Australian context throughout the paper and it argues for de-colonising strategies in teaching and schooling. These strategies include, negotiating difference within an ethics of care of reciprocity and recognition through the use of standpoint theory as both method and methodology.

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## Introduction

Ethics of care theory is a theoretical framework that examines dependent and inter-dependent relationships and the focus of this paper is on the student/teacher relationship. The social impact of care (Cox, 1995) within society is unmeasurable, but it is central to the emotional economy. Gilligan's (1982) analysis on feminist methodologies highlights the general omission of the epistemology of care in research. Ethics of care research was extended by Noddings (1984, 2001) who made significant contributions to the theory in the field of education and focused on the enactment of care and its connection to student learning outcomes. An examination of ethics of care and how care is neutralised by the notion of universality within the theory is critiqued in the first section of this paper.

Indigenous ethics of care is explored as a counternarrative to white ethics of care in schooling. Student reciprocity with teachers is central to ethics of care and it is linked to student motivation. This section in the paper explores the way Indigenous students' cultural habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) can hinder their relationship with their teacher if it is not shared or understood by the teacher. It explores the spiral effect of students' resistance to teachers that occur when there is misrepresentation of their personhood as a result of the disconnection between the performances of care by the teacher, informed by their habitus, and

that of the student. It further highlights how Indigenous knowledges and habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) are not embedded in schooling and it argues that assessment, from a student perspective, signifies success or failure and success hinges on the students' relationship with the teacher and their cultural knowledge.

An examination of the usability of standpoint theory in the schooling context offers insight into complex positionalities (Alcoff, 1988) that are embedded within relationships of dependency between teachers and students. It concludes with a recommendation for critical approaches to teaching informed by standpoint theory (Harding, 2004) that facilitates student and teachers' capacity to code-switch (Giroux, 2005) between their own cultural norms and the normative practices of the students they teach. Underpinning this paper is the examination of the way in which social reproduction through the education system in Australia maintains white hegemonic practices through ethics of care.

### *Ethics of care*

Gilligan's (1982) and Noddings (1984) work on the epistemology of care was challenged by Rolon-Dow (2005) and Thompson (1998) on the grounds of not including black feminist perspectives and the sanguine constructions of care that were represented through the white middle class model. The gendered practices embedded in the nuclear family and caring models were further critiqued in relation to how this model was applied in the school setting by a largely Anglo female teaching force (Walkerdine, 1992, p. 16). As the female teacher and student, or nurse and patient relationships are routine examples for the examination of ethics of care, consideration of gender is not only a concern, but also class and race.

The ethic of care is not neutral, but is located within race, class and gender structures and is expressed through either nuclear or community models of care. The performativity of care within these models differ in terms of enactments of responsibility, reciprocity of relationships, values, mores and cultural practices. There is a dearth of research of the performance of care when enacted by the teacher towards the learner. Instead, many key education theorists (McInerney & McInerney, 2002) uncritically affirm Noddings (1984) homogenised pedagogical approach when educating in diverse and complex environments. Care is seen as an uncritical act of good-will.

Whilst there is reference to diversity, the performance of care and the ways in which students read this performance is privileged within a white frame. "Performative acts" (Butler, 1993) by a teacher in a class include utterances of regulations, such as "quiet please". If a student is not quiet, the consequences can result in a spiralling descent of the relationship between a teacher and student where the teacher's power trumps the student's position and is positioned as "disrespectful". This is the "reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler, 1993).

This *dominance* approach to care (Townshend-Smith, 1989, p. 19) informed by the values of the gendered white nuclear family inhibits a collaborative dialogic relationship between those cared for and those doing the caring in white institutions. Through the lens of ethics of care, it is possible to examine how the performativity of care that is sanctioned socially and institutionally in countries like Australia privilege some students and limit others in educational settings. Moran argues:

... white cultures, privilege and practice are reproduced as dominant, without the intention of domination and oppression necessarily being present in the minds of white social actors. This argument does not excuse whites from their role in the participation in, and reproduction of racialised privilege, nor does it preclude social actors from self-reflexive or rational calculation in relation to the intended outcomes of their social actions. It simply highlights how unconsidered structural consequences flow on from social praxis, resulting in the constant remaking of social relations. (Moran, 2004)

The “unconsidered structural consequences” (Moran, 2004) impact on students that do not embody white middle class codes of conduct. Instead, when Indigenous students do not respond positively to a teachers’ performance of care, the absence of reciprocity is seen as the student’s problem, rather than contextualised within a system of power and privilege. The invisible power of whiteness in social relations serves to marginalise Indigenous students and students from diverse backgrounds by white social actors in particular ways that annul the teachers’ accountability within this system. Socially just and inclusive pedagogies are thereby lost in translation when educators fail to account for their performances of care as culturally, socially and structurally located.

The need for recognition of care within pedagogy is significant as it is within the parameters of a relationship that reciprocity between a student and teacher occurs. Reciprocity is the two-way relationship that is built between student and teacher over time. Students judge teachers when they appear not to care. Resistance rather than reciprocity emerges when students feel misrepresented. This signifies to the student a lack of care by the teacher to contextualise their standpoint. Booker argues for positive relationships between teachers and peers in schools and claims that it is through this relationship that feelings of belonging and connectedness to the school are contingent (2004, p. 137). Generating a sense of belonging for students that are a minority in the school is critical to learning outcomes (Booker, 2004, p. 131).

### *Pedagogy and ethics of care*

There are pedagogical concerns underpinned by ethics of care and its corollary of performativity in the microcosms of the classroom between students and teachers. Relationships are informed by a shared reciprocity that is built through performances that are read by the teacher and student. When a student does not perform enactments of reciprocity if they vary from those of the teacher within interchanges, then he/she is without agency. A gridlock between teachers and students occurs when students do not “perform” within the prescribed, but invisible codes that are set within the classroom.

Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous pedagogy are diverse and have their own sets of performativity and are underpinned by an Indigenous ethics of care that is local and specific to communities. Indigenous extended family models of care disperse the responsibility of care and education of children across adult members of the immediate and extended family. Yet this model of care has historically been seen as lacking by colonial authorities and thereby was the very principle from which the policies of the Stolen Generation emerged. Indigenous scholars (MacGill & Blanch, 2013; Nakata, 1998) argue for recognition of Indigenous student standpoints in order to create a sense of place and belonging. Kinship ties, obligatory practices and roles within extended family models of care are understood as reciprocated responsibilities between siblings, parents, aunties and uncles and students. Engaging with reciprocity is an enactment of obligatory practice.

Whilst the value of reciprocity is present in all cultural groups, it is performed differently. A child's worldview is conscientised through inter-family disciplinary models and the responsibility of a child to reciprocate with an adult is coded. Dominant cultural models of reciprocity are enacted within schools. Therefore, inclusive pedagogical practices are not achievable without addressing some of the key performances that shape the dimensions of ethics of care within a pedagogical framework.

However, in the context of Australian schools, the performance of whiteness through body language (Cooks, 2003) that signifies a value, such as gratitude operates consciously and subconsciously. However, is it possible to educate teachers out of white embodied privilege when schools are framed by whiteness? Arguably, an educated teaching force that has examined their own performativity within schooling, (as many have done) and thereby embodied a criticality would mobilise systems that are inclusive. Moreover, a reflective teaching force is critical to an inclusive school, but to shift the ways in which education systems produce and re-produce Anglo-centric knowledge within schooling remains equally problematic.

### *Assessment, ethics of care and inclusive knowledges*

Pedagogy is informed by ethics of care through the way in which the teacher teaches within the classroom. Teaching practices are shaped by constructivism, which depends on relationships between the student and the teacher. Student motivation drives student learning outcomes that are then measured through assessment. Teachers are trained to follow Bloom's amended taxonomy and align their constructivist curriculum with their assessment. Assessment is the measuring tool for student comprehension of the set learning outcomes, but also operates as a signifier of success and failure. Student motivation to work towards the goals set by teachers, are measured summatively or formatively. Student success, to varying levels is therefore dependent on their relationship with their teacher.

Another issue of concern is what is being assessed. Indigenous knowledges in schools are generally not assessed in Australian schools. Schools may acknowledge Country through recognising the First Nation's people of the land or they may fly an Aboriginal Flag. The new Australian Curriculum mandates the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum as a cross-curriculum priority, but few teachers know how. Many take a reductionist and homogenised position by including dot paintings into a class. Moreover, the dearth of assessment on Indigenous knowledges further signifies what knowledge is valued and what knowledges are made absent. Assessment signifies what knowledge is to be retained and therefore valued.

Indigenous scholars (Rigney, 1999; Sarra, 2003) have argued for the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, knowledges and cultural capital to be built into and not bolted onto the curriculum and schooling. There has been significant input into Indigenous education and teaching and learning in diverse classrooms, but few challenge the link between the performativity of ethics of care and its link to student motivation. Rigney, Rigney, and Hughes (1998) argued for the presence of Indigenous teachers in schools as a key to engaging Indigenous student learners. In so doing, Indigenous students would learn about Indigenous knowledges, be able to connect with their teachers who understood their social capital and ways of being in the world (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) and thereby enhance motivation.

Ignorance of the diversity of care practices by teachers that are grounded in whiteness assume any resistance to their care is due to the perversity of the Other. As Partington argues “our belief that our forms of knowledge are best, our belief that our teaching strategies are best, our belief that our child rearing practices are the best all hinder our listening, learning and understanding and hence hinder our teaching” (1998, p. 193).

The “opinionated” habitus is problematic (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 416) as it limits the capacity to hear in acute and problematic situations between teachers and students. When there is conflict, the teacher is located in a power relation that renders student voices powerless. Moreover, the gendered construction of care is located in a sanguine neutral space. Instead, a critical position of care is required in relation to pedagogy. The fatal mistake is when care is deemed a personality trait instead of a coded form of morality. This intervention to care provides opportunities for transformative pedagogical practices.

### Pedagogy and standpoint theory

Pedagogy is interpreted into the real world through our values and knowledge systems (Borland, 1991, p. 73; Burns, 1997, p. 292). Standpoint epistemology informs values and when understood in the context of power relations, teachers can create sites for reciprocity with students. We are “filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 19) and arguably an educated researcher/teacher understands the dimensions of the affective domain that restructures their power relations with students.

We are defined by a “field of cultural terms” (Foster, 1984, p. 19), particularly in education, teachers have the opportunity to engage with standpoint theory as a “methodological tool” that challenges the ways in which dominant cultures (Foster, 1984, p. 19) are privileged within the affective domain.

Valuing knowledge which explicitly acknowledges location or standpoint epistemology is valuable as a strategy. We value located knowledge and the “view from below” partly because we believe that these approaches currently provide more rational criteria for judging knowledge than the spurious claims to objectivity .... (Davies & Seuffert, 2000, p. 273)

Standpoint theory provides an understanding of marginalised voices, the performances of dominant Australian culture and the privilege of whiteness. Understanding the “view from below” provides insight into how indirect discrimination operates in education. In particular, the “privilege of ignorance” (Thompson, 1998, p. 523) that operates through the absence of recognition of multiple divergent voices.

Standpoint theory as a conceptual model allows dissenting angry voices to be read within the framework of their experiences of “epistemic authority” (McConaghy, 2000, p. 128) within institutional settings that routinely position Indigenous students as deficit. Taylor argues that

people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (Taylor, 1994, p. 25)

When students feel misrecognised and sentenced to detention for an altercation with a teacher, their integrity is challenged, rather than the teacher’s. Fallouts as a result of miscommunication are not often the beginning point of examination between student and

teacher, but instead are often read by the teacher as student resistance. Standpoint theory requires “strong reflexivity” (Olesen, 2000, p. 229) and understanding of one’s location in the context of the broader social political systems we operate through in education. A “wide-angle” vision of students’ experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 262) provides a “broader politics of engagement” (hooks, 1989 cited in Giroux, 2005, p. 73) that facilitate student/teacher relationships.

The “negative narrative orientations imposed by the mores of the larger society” (Cannon, 1988, pp. 76, 77) can be used to examine how one is shaped by these mores. “Socially constructed or semiotically posited” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 293) narratives can be decoded within the relationships that don’t work. This way, teachers and their pedagogical strategies shift with a deepening knowledge of their students’ standpoints. This further avoids, the “underlying persistent essentialism” (cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995, p. 7) that routinely defines Indigenous student cohorts.

Pre-service teachers have the opportunity to navigate their own standpoint theory with a focus on multiplicity that disrupts universalist epistemologies (Wiegman, 1999, p. 149). This supports the teacher/research nexus vital for a well-educated teaching force that moves beyond typical narratives of the good and bad student binary. An emphasis on contradiction, difference and multiple subjectivities (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000, p. 119) leans towards Biesta’s notion of “weak education” (Biesta, 2013). Weakness in this sense is “what makes education possible” (Biesta, 2013, p. 4) through co-creative and transformative ways that are neither oppressive for the student or teacher. Co-creative curriculum would include Indigenous knowledges informed by Indigenous communities in local and specific ways.

The use of standpoint theory within pedagogy is the “explication of ‘meaning’ rather than the isolation of truth” (Burns, 1997, p. 4) within a complex understanding of cultural knowledges that are not othered by white regimes of truth. Inclusion of Indigenous knowledges into schooling is a negotiated practice. This helps overturn “the habits of institutional (as well as forms of racial, gender, and class-specific) privilege” (Giroux, 2005, p. 27) and also offers new ways to measure student learning outcomes, rather than through national testing regimes that only measure white knowledges.

A “politics of possibility that can be used to rewrite the narratives of subordinate groups not merely in reaction to the forces of domination but in response to the construction of alternative visions and futures” (Giroux, 2005, p. 59) offers a pedagogy of hope. The integration of Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous ethics of care practices in schools offers such a possibility of hope.

In Australia, many non-Indigenous teachers are ignorant about Indigenous histories, politics and knowledge. This is deeply problematic when teachers refrain gingerly from not teaching in these areas. Standpoint theory offers a trajectory out of this problematic location as it relies on individuals starting from their own position (histories, politics and narratives) in order to understand those from which they do not belong. As Davies and Seuffert explain:

... [I]t is the existence of the standpoint which is important, but it is vital that any standpoint be limited to its actual context, and not taken as universal. Attributing a broad content of knowledge to any one group without appreciation of the range of power differences will result in empirically unsatisfying and potentially dangerous re-stereotyping. Feminist standpoint epistemology remains useful if we recognise that the knowledge produced by oppressed people is not better than knowledge produced by oppressors because it is more “objective”. Rather, we are making a value judgment that the position from which the knowledge is produced

provides the knowledge producers with a different and often more complete understanding of the oppression. (2000, p. 271)

Whilst educators many not acquire a “complete understanding” (Davies & Seuffert, 2000, p. 271) of Indigenous standpoints or standpoint of diversity, it does however move the teaching force from a site of colour blindness (Thompson, 1998, p. 524) to one that acknowledges historical and political location of privilege and its relationship to colonialism.

Once this is understood teachers learn to re-read their students within an alternate paradigm. Noddings (2001) argues that the teacher/learner interaction depends on the process of students responding to teachers. Students can ask questions, but this is codified through raising hands during question time. When the teacher recognises codified practices and makes them explicit, it serves as the first phase of code switching.

Code switching (Giroux, 2005) is an enabling term that centres student agency through the understanding of the covert and overt performances enacted within institutionalised sites, such as schools. This concept sits within a pedagogical framework. When teachers are informed of the multifarious codes students perform based on their own cultural norms and practices resistance within dialogic relationships between the teacher and student is reduced. This critical pedagogy explicitly teaches the concept of power/knowledge and positionality. From this point, discipline-specific knowledge can be taught as the student/teacher nexus is established within a transparent model of exchange.

The cultural *mestizaje* (Anzaldúa, 1999) also provides a useful metaphor for developing sites of inter-change in the classroom. The *mestizaje* (Anzaldúa, 1999) is refracted and partial allowing for openness of dialogue providing opportunities for deeper understandings of subjectivity.

The term “cultural *mestizaje*,” often used as a concept challenging existing racial categories and representations, can be employed as a heuristic device that induces teachers, students, and cultural workers to study the ways cultural interaction and exchange take place. In a critical context, *mestizaje* becomes not an educational goal as much as a category for careful scrutiny into the forces that reshape culture and influence identity. (Alcoff, 1995; Haymes, 1996; Keating, 1995; McLaren, 1993; Wellman, 1996 cited in Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2000, 25)

The *mestizaje* provides an opportunity for teachers to become self-reflexive “critical educators” (Giroux, 2005, pp. 24, 25). Mapping the cultural *mestizaje* through the lens of ethics of care operationalises pluralist subjectivities. Furthermore, a critical pedagogy of care informed by race consciousness reflects Tatum’s notion of the white ally:

The role of the ally is to speak up against systems of oppression, and to challenge other whites to do the same. Teaching about racism needs to shift from an exploration of the experiences of victims and victimizers to that of empowered people of colour and their white allies, creating the possibility of working together as partners in the establishment of a more just society. (1994, p. 474)

Arguably, achieving the status of the white ally is always deferred and instead sits along “a continuum that moves from dys-consciousness at one end of a continuum and consciousness at the other” (Aveling, 2004). Disrupting white centred pedagogy builds “equality of respect” (Gaita, 2000, p. 72) within the teaching/learning nexus. Institutional support is required to achieve these collective goals. In order to work along this continuum, it is essential that teachers and pre-service teachers from Anglo-centric backgrounds are conscientised to racialisation and the power and politics embedded within schooling. In particular, examining one’s standpoint within the contact zone of cross-cultural classroom encounters when

relationships go awry between teachers and students. This provides space for dialogue, accountability and agency for both student and teacher, making explicit the scripts for re-thinking how care or its perceived absence informs cultural mores and codes. Teachers ongoing development of Indigenous students' cultural codes and those of students from diverse backgrounds enables possibilities to build culturally safe frameworks to generate reciprocity and motivation required for successful student learning outcomes.

## Conclusion

White ethics of care practices are socially reproduced through performances of values that assume reciprocity between teachers and students. When students do not reciprocate with teachers, the student is marked as non-compliant rather than contextualised within the broader social politics of schooling. Indigenous students routinely experience "colour-blind" teaching practices (Thompson, 1998) as a result of ignorance of performativity that emerges through ethics of care practices. "Differing perspectives" (Sevenhuijsen, 1998, p. 83) on pedagogy and its link to care are largely ignored in Australian schools, as care is located as an enactment of good-will rather than ethical framework that is informed by cultural practices. Constructive inter-sectionality that informs pedagogical practices is needed to move towards contextualised standpoints from the position of the students and teachers within a site of commensurability.

The analysis of the performativity of care needs to shift from sanguine conversations of personality types of teachers to an educated workforce that authentically engages with the moral framework of ethics of care in schooling. This is informed by an understanding of the ways in which schools have been the driving force of cultural reproduction of white hegemonic practices measured by student success or failure through assessment. A critical pedagogy of care offers moral hope and agency for both students and teachers through transparent dialogic exchange. Shifting the lens towards the machinations of the dispositif towards practices informed by code-switching within the *mestijaze* offers infinite possibilities for new ways of educating in the twenty-first century.

## Disclosure statement

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