

The Myth of the Colorblind Writing Classroom: White Instructors Confront White Privilege in Their Classrooms

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The myth of the race neutral writing classroom is largely informed by the colorblindness logic, a byproduct of meritocracy. The meritocracy myth maintains an ideology that individuals gain social and material capital based on merit, without regard to socially constructed concepts such as race. In an attempt to uphold the ideology of meritocracy, many white instructors act as if race has no relevance in academics. Gordon explains that colorblindness “maintains that race does not exist as a meaningful category and posits that the benefits accrued to White people are earned by (gifted) individuals rather than systemically conferred” (2005, p. 281). In the writing classroom, instructors often adopt a colorblind perspective, reiterating the sentiment that race has no place in the writing classroom (Hairston, 2003). For many writing instructors, to see race is to reinforce a racist social system that has historically marginalized people of color and given unfair advantages to White European Americans (WEAs) in our society. In their attempt to give every student equal footing in the writing classroom, many instructors posit that they do not see race, claiming, “It does not matter if my students are Black, orange, or polka-dotted, they are simply students.”

Even though colorblindness advocates for a merit-based system of reward, it rarely works to the advantage of people of color. As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and others have shown, the colorblind ideology is false. Moreover, adopting a colorblind perspective in the writing classroom does not mean that all differences are insignificant. Rather, a colorblind perspective usually translates into classroom practices that build upon and bestow neutral WEA students’ cultural, linguistic, and racial knowledge.

This chapter addresses the ways in which writing instructors attempt to displace the colorblind perspective by making their writing classes multicultural (Diversity and Antiracist approaches) and then examines the pedagogical practices of two white writing instructors, Victoria and Michael as they attempt to displace the colorblind approach to teaching writing in their classrooms by using an antiracist

approach to multiculturalism. In an attempt to situate these two narrative analyses in the realm of multicultural pedagogies, we first address the diversity and antiracist approaches to teaching writing.

Diversity Approach to Teaching Writing

A popular approach to debunking the colorblind approach to teaching writing is the diversity approach—an approach that involves the infusion of non-WEA texts into an already existing WEA writing curriculum. Most commonly, writing instructors meet their diversity goals by adopting a multicultural reader in their classrooms. This approach is inclusive in the sense that the readings include the voices of cultural and linguistic “others” who have otherwise been completely left out or marginalized in the colorblind approach to teaching writing. The underlying goal of the diversity approach is for students to learn that all cultures have valuable beliefs and practices that we all can learn and benefit from. By understanding and appreciating our differences, we can create a sense of cultural harmony. A common diversity slogan is, “We are all the same because we are all different.”

While the diversity approach to teaching writing is a positive move away from the colorblind approach, it can be critiqued on two grounds: First, it can be accused of creating an “othering effect,” and, second, it can be negated on its inability to deconstruct race. The “othering effect” refers to the process in which “multicultural texts” are marginalized and WEA texts remain the unspoken norm for a writing curriculum. This “othering effect” primarily occurs in the way these texts are labeled and discussed. Multicultural texts are usually labeled as such—multicultural, meaning non-WEA. The labeling and discussion of these texts as multicultural serves to classify them as texts that focus on the cultural “other.” This “othering effect” keeps multicultural texts on the cultural fringe of classroom practices and knowledge formation. The WEA texts, while they too represent cultural beliefs and practices, are usually not discussed or labeled as such. Whereas the cultural “other” texts belong to the multicultural category of texts, the WEA curriculum bears no such label. Not only are WEA texts not classified as multicultural, they lack any cultural labeling, WEA or otherwise. The practice of not labeling WEA texts as cultural texts serves to keep them as the unstated cultural norm, the norm to which all other texts can be differentiated from. Thus, despite its inclusive qualities, the diversity approach to teaching writing, in many ways, reinforces the status quo.

The other critique of the diversity approach is its inability to deconstruct race. In its insistence that we are all equal because we are all different, the diversity approach, or what Gilyard refers to as the “formulaic polycultural curriculum” (1999, p. 47), neglects to examine how race indeed shapes different life experiences and opportunities for people. Nieto and Bode critique the diversity approach by

stating, “To be effective, multicultural education needs to move beyond diversity as a passing fad. It needs to take into account our history of immigration as well as the social, political, and economic inequality and exclusion that have characterized our past and present, particularly our educational history” (2008, p. 5). Without attending to issues of inequity and particularly the role race plays in constructing social inequities, we remain unaware of and thereby unwittingly reproduce racist discourses and practices in our classrooms.

The diversity approach, without the deconstruction of race and white privilege, can do more harm than good in classrooms. When composition instructors include and discuss “multicultural texts” in their writing classrooms without analyzing race as a social construct, they risk reifying race as a biological term (Gilyard, 1999, p. 47). A classroom discussion on race under the false idea of race as an objective, biological fact leads students to “pedestrian interpretations and constructions inside a bankrupt race-relations model, thus leading to a sort of King to King solution, students dreaming and all getting along—rhetorically” (Gilyard, 1999, p. 49). This false notion of white people and people of color needing to “just get along” stops any analysis concerning the deep-rooted systematic racism in the university system and society. It prohibits any critical analysis of race and eliminates any opportunity by the educator or the student to acknowledge white privilege, while at the same time strengthening white privilege. What needs to happen is a deconstruction of race, but perhaps most importantly the white race. Goodburn urges educators “to move beyond defining texts as multicultural because they are written by those other to ourselves and begin thinking about how all discourses are inherently raced, through social constructions of whiteness as well as social constructions of color” (1999, p. 84).

If a compositionist brings in essays by bell hooks, Percival Everett, Malcolm X, Sherman Alexie, Sam Edgar Wideman, and Richard Wright as a way to illustrate the power of the social construction of race to oppress and marginalize, then a foundation about race must be set. What could be the result if the compositionist had brought these writers into the classroom without first illustrating to students how race is socially constructed? Including these works without deconstructing race reifies these writers’ place on the cultural fringe. The compositionist’s attempt to incorporate multicultural texts into the classroom without first deconstructing race and his/her own racial position make him/her culpable in marginalizing and othering these writers. In bringing in multicultural texts and not examining their own racial place, the white compositionist is telling students of color, “although I profit every day from white privilege, I am still sensitive to their place within the racial discourse.” This is disingenuous and hypocritical. It is tantamount to the old clichéd defense by whites—“I’m not a racist. Some of my best friends are Black.” The result of using multicultural texts within a classroom accepts the antiquated and false notion of race as biological because the teacher’s failure to prove otherwise.

Antiracist Approach to Teaching Writing

Antiracist pedagogy centers on racism and “insists on criticism of racist domination and its impact on education, including composition curricula” (Gilyard, 1999, p. 47). An antiracist pedagogical approach allows students and professors to evaluate their own places of privilege or non-privilege within society while trying to displace instances of racism both in the composition classroom and in the larger society.

When writing instructors and their students either individually or collectively deconstruct how racism works, they must avoid the common assumption that racism is a set of beliefs and practices that only “racist” individuals participate in. This conceptualization of racism, as residing in someone, allows us to dismiss the relevancy of race in our own lives, as most individuals firmly claim, “I’m not racist.” Whether one is racist or not, one produces racist discourses. The “new racism” locates race in the ideologies of language or more specifically in rhetoric (Villanueva, 2006, p. 5). Rhetoric, intentionally or not, is always ideological (Berlin 2003, p. 717), and we cannot avoid reproducing the ideology within the rhetoric. Within this understanding of rhetoric, the individual can never act with complete freedom, but rather, all action is a product of the cultural forces at work (Berlin, 2003, p. 731).

Given the pervasive nature of rhetoric, it is naive to think that when writing instructors shut the door to the classroom and class begins that teachers and students alike are suddenly free of the cultural and societal ideologies constantly working on them. Students and teachers do not leave their race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, or class in a heap outside the classroom door, so nor can they dismiss themselves from their inclusion in dominant discourses. Racial discourse influences rhetoric and composition pedagogies, so not to examine its influence in the classroom not only reifies its dominance, but ignores the context in which writing is produced. It also completely ignores the marginalization of people of color. To ignore the effect racial discourse has on the “othering” of students of color erodes the trust between educator and student, potentially destroying the environment of the classroom as a place that should “build students’ confidence and competence as writers” (Hairston, 2003, p. 698).

Just as multicultural texts should not be inclusive of only those who are marginalized in our society, whiteness theory reminds us that racial analyses should not only focus on those who are marginalized by racism (Thompson, 1999, p. 145–146). Rather, racial analyses should also focus on the benefactors of racism: whites. As such, writing instructors must examine how their pedagogical practices reproduce or challenge whiteness. Imagine a large group of WEAs discussing the issue of race and then focusing the discussion on themselves and how they have been constructed racially.

To begin the process of examining whiteness, white instructors must first deconstruct their own privilege before leading students in a discussion on race as a

social construct. Just because white educators are in authoritative positions does not mean they can escape the scrutiny of their own racial position and privilege. White educators must embrace this scrutiny as it will lead them to evaluate their own biases and prejudices and make them better teachers because just as we (teachers) are “read,” upon entering the classroom, we (as teachers) also read our students and recognize these students’ placement in relation to the dominant culture. Although it is imperative to recognize difference and its importance, it is also important to analyze “how we, as teachers and researchers, read and write our students as ‘raced’ texts” (Goodburn, 1999, p. 72).

Once WEAs recognize instances of whiteness and how they benefit from it, whiteness begins to lose its invisibility and its power to influence. “To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tools here” (McIntosh, 1990, p. 6). Once white instructors begin to identify how whiteness operates in their own lives, they can begin to deconstruct how white privilege operates within their writing classrooms.

As an illustration of an antiracist approach that deconstructs whiteness, and thereby displacing a colorblind pedagogy two writing instructors use critical auto-ethnography to record and analyze their daily teaching practices in their First Year Writing classes. The following two sections provide narrative analyses of Victoria and Michael’s classrooms as they examine whiteness in their own teaching pedagogy.

Victoria’s Class

I am teaching a typical first year composition class at a state university in the Southwest. I have 21 students, mostly freshmen (18–19 years old), with almost an equal mix of males and females, and only a few ethnic minority students (two Mexican Americans and one African American). My class is at 8 AM, so I am ambitious to create an interactive classroom experience early in the class hour. To begin class, I ask a daily attendance question.

This activity does not directly solicit race talk, however because I ask students questions about themselves, their cultural, linguistic, and racial experiences often surface nonetheless. Some of the questions I ask include: “What is something that people do that really gets on your nerves? What is the best excuse you have given to get out of something? What is the most embarrassing thing you have done during a class session?” One morning I asked, “What was your favorite television show while you were growing up? As I read the role sheet alphabetically and called out the names of several WEA students, they responded with shows like *Saved by the Bell*, *The Brady Bunch*, or *Full House*. When it came time for Francisco¹ (Mexican American) to respond, he said in a soft voice, “It’s a Spanish show.” Seeking an

answer to the question, I asked, “What show was it?” Francisco, again in a soft voice said, “It was a Spanish comedy show.” Persistently I asked, “What was the name of the show?” He responded, *El Chavo del Ocho*.²

In my attempt to break away from a colorblind perspective and conduct a racial analysis in my writing classroom, I later reflected on the sequence of events that occurred during that class session. As a result of my analysis, it became clear that Francisco did not perceive our classroom as race-neutral or colorblind. Being one of only two Mexican Americans in the classroom, he was likely keenly aware of the white dominance that permeated the classroom.

As I reflected about the question and answer activity, it became clear to me that whiteness was embodied in our white bodies [white students and teacher], as well as in our race talk. As I read the role sheet and called out students’ names to answer the question, I called on several white students before I called on Francisco. In the process of naming several shows that were entirely in English and made up of white cast members, the class participated in a process of cultural bonding (McIntyre, 1997). After each student named a show, a few other students chimed in with their personal reflection about the said show. For example, students spontaneously responded about the shows in general, “Oh, I loved that show,” or “I remember watching that show every day after school.” Alternatively, they commented on specific cast members, “I was so in love with Zack [Saved by the Bell],” or “Weren’t the Olson twins so adorable [Full House].” Sometimes they would solicit a response from other students’ knowledge on the show, “Didn’t Greg end up sleeping with Marcia [Brady Bunch]?” And then another student responds, “No. He slept with the mother. What is her name? . . . Florence Henderson.” Having watched all these shows myself, I would sometimes contribute to the conversations. For example, when a student posed the question, “Didn’t the dad [from *The Brady Bunch*] end up dying,” I responded, “Yes. He died from complications arising from AIDS.”

By the time I called on Francisco, the class, including myself, had set the parameters for the type of response that was expected: the naming of an English language show with white cast members followed by student/teacher personal reflections about the show. Since Francisco’s favorite childhood show did not fit neatly into the parameters of white talk that we had set up prior to his answer, he withheld the name of his favorite show, and instead simply told us that it was a “Spanish show.” As a result of the previous class discussions, Francisco likely believed that we [white students and teacher] would not be familiar with the show and thus could not respond to it in a personal manner in the way we related to the other shows. When I asked him again to tell us what the show was, he still avoided naming the show and instead gave a response that would be meaningful to the mostly white, English-speaking group, “It was a Spanish comedy show.” For Francisco, simply naming the show, *El Chavo Del Ocho*, to a WEA group would not be meaningful because most would probably not know anything about the show. In an attempt to

give meaningful answers to an English-speaking, white classroom, he tailored his responses to give us (WEAs) information we might want to know about his favorite childhood show—namely that it was a Spanish comedy.

After reflecting on this classroom experience, it became painfully obvious that I was contributing to the production of whiteness in my classroom, thereby creating a context in which Spanish and Mexican cultural practices had little meaning. While I am fully aware that I cannot forego the benefits of whiteness or cease my own contribution to the meaning of whiteness, I nonetheless disappointed myself. After all, yes I am white, but I grew up in and currently live in a Mexican community wherein I am known as Chavela, not Victoria. I am fluent in Spanish, have three children who speak Spanish only. I am very familiar with *El Chavo del Ocho* (*La Chilindrina* is one of my favorite all-time television characters) and I consider myself hyper-attentive to issues of racism and multiculturalism.

Hoping to displace a colorblind perspective, I took the information I learned from the attendance question activity and paid attention to the ways in which race and language were operating in my classroom and to whose benefit. In my future discussions with Francisco, I spoke to him in Spanish. During our conversations we often discussed the politics of language and agreed that society unfairly marginalizes minority languages. In one conversation, he said:

The schools and government say they want immigrants to learn English but when they [immigrants] do, they don't necessarily get a better job or graduate from high school. I don't think they really want us to learn English. I think they just use the English language issue as an excuse to keep us in poor paying jobs.

I was excited about Francisco's critical perspective on race and language, so I continued to discuss these issues with him throughout the semester.

For the final assignment in the class, I assigned a group research paper. This research paper required all the common elements of a research paper; including a claim, evidence, library research, proper citation, etc., but in the end it would be one paper, written by a group of people. With several students deciding the topic and claim for the paper, I was hopeful white students would not silence Francisco's critical perspectives. I monitored his group's discussions closely, often adding my own critical perspective to their conversations. I was delighted when "minority languages" came up and eventually became this group's research topic.

After much discussion, the group decided to focus on the role "minority languages" play in the work place, which turned out to be rather complicated. For example, shortly after this meeting a white male student named George sent the group (and me) an email telling them that he wanted to change groups. He elaborated by saying that although he did feel this topic was important, he was a strong advocate of "English Only." The group was now down to three people: Francisco

and two white women (Amanda and Alyssa). Once the group met again, they reassigned responsibilities to each individual. Amanda and Alyssa, who were assigned the task of conducting outside research, reported back to the group, stating they spent ample time researching the “important roles of minority languages,” but could not find anything. According to them, they could only find articles that supported the removal of foreign languages and assimilation into English as quickly as possible. It was not until they contacted the librarian directly that they, according to them, were able to find research that supported the importance of minority languages in the US.

The final research paper resulted in a critical research paper that confronted common language stereotypes, such as “Immigrants do not want to learn English” and unfair hiring practices, such as hiring undocumented workers who do not speak English and then paying them a fraction of what “documented” workers earn for the same work. The white students in Francisco’s group learned a lot about language practices and politics in the United States. While their research paper confronted many myths about language, their presentation of the research to the larger class revealed further complexity to their views of language. In one of the group meetings about the presentation, Francisco suggested that they start off the presentation speaking Spanish. The women responded enthusiastically to this idea, stating that speaking Spanish was a good idea since the research addressed the importance of minority languages. In subsequent group meetings, Francisco started to teach and rehearse the lines in Spanish that they would use in the presentation. Within these group meetings, the three group members had a good time laughing at Amanda’s and Alyssa’s English accents in Spanish, but Francisco seemed content that they were trying nonetheless. As an instructor, I felt good about their decision to speak Spanish in their research presentation. I was convinced that my own modeling of speaking Spanish in the classroom to Francisco, helped set the precedent that speaking Spanish in class was acceptable.

To my surprise, when it came time for Francisco’s group to present their research to the class, Spanish was never spoken. I asked the group about this after class and learned that the women had convinced Francisco that speaking Spanish in the presentation was not a good idea because nearly no one in class would understand what was being said. In the end, even though their research presentation emphasized the preservation of minority languages, the group simultaneously conformed to WEA ideology that has us believe that only English can be spoken in an academic setting. Thus, at the same time they were speaking to the importance of minority languages, they were indeed marginalizing a minority language—stipulating through performance in their presentation that Spanish can be spoken at home or when needed in work environments, but not in formal academic settings.

Throughout the semester I took notes on many different examples of how race operated in my writing classroom and by no means was I aware of all the

ways in which race and whiteness manifested in my classroom. By attempting to be color-attentive, instead of colorblind, my hope is to disrupt the normalcy of whiteness. In my work with Francisco, I disrupted whiteness by speaking to him in Spanish and by discussing language issues that displaced the assumption that English is the only legitimate language that can be used in the contexts of academia. However, based on their research presentation, it is unclear to what extent my anti-racist teaching practices interrupted the logic of WEA ideologies.

Michael's Class

I presented my freshmen composition students with University of Texas journalism professor Robert Jensen's white privilege article. Jensen, an American citizen of northern European descent argues he has been the benefactor of unearned white privilege within academia. After discussing the article, I asked my students if they believed white privilege exists. The students who spoke out during this discussion were white students who claimed there is no white privilege.

During this discussion, the students of color were largely silent. To prove white skin does not come with unearned privilege, the white students listed examples such as affirmative action and designated periods of multiculturalism such as Black History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month. I pointed out to the students that these were programs created to combat systematic racism and the marginalization of minority voices and did not disprove the concept of white privilege. Then I admitted to the classroom that I, a white male like Robert Jensen, was a benefactor of white privilege. This put an end to the discussion. All the students, white students and students of color, did not know how to react to such an admission. I had broken white privilege's first rule—I acknowledged it.

As Russell Ferguson writes in the introduction to *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, "In our society dominant discourse tries never to speak its own name. Its authority is based on absence" (1995, p. 11). Acknowledging my own white privilege was the first step in confronting white privilege within the classroom and inviting students to embark on a critical discourse about race. It would be impossible for me to teach multicultural texts, to deconstruct race as a social construction, and attempt to empower white students and students of color to critically analyze racial issues without first admitting my own privileged position and subsequent power within what Ferguson calls the "invisible center" (1995, p. 9). To not do so and then engage students in a conversation on race would come across as hypocritical and disingenuous and more nefariously would reify the dominant discourse. Not to deconstruct race "in the contexts in which we work, is to confirm the prevailing discourse and to be implicated in the maintenance of an exploitative social order to the exact extent that said discourse promotes exploitation"

(Gilyard, 1999, p. 49).

I have had some success in deconstructing my own white privilege and race in my freshmen composition classroom. During the initial discussion about white privilege, I heard the response that there is no such thing as white privilege, but I heard nothing from the students of color. However, I did witness a few students of color react non-verbally. One such reaction was from Sofia, a self-described Mexican-American woman. She fidgeted in her chair when the white students said white privilege did not exist and then offered the program of affirmative action as evidence. She hesitated to talk, so I did not push the issue. I gathered from private discussions with Sofia that she felt her views would be judged as biased because they come from a woman of color. She knew whatever she said would be measured by her positionality as a Mexican woman. Her voice would be marginalized because it was in her interest to argue the idea white privilege certainly existed.

Through private conferences and written feedback in papers, I made it clear to Sofia that I believed race was a social construct and white privilege certainly existed. I have to admit this was not an easy process. I shared with her some of the privileges that even as a working class male I had received. Initially, it was apparent that she did not fully trust me. Although she never disrespected me in any fashion, I noticed that she often just listened attentively not knowing if she should believe me or not. It was not until I spent many hours with her that I slowly got her to have faith in me.

I require my students to write a reader response for each assigned reading. In these reader responses, I intentionally do not mark grammatical or mechanical mistakes, and I never tell students that they are wrong, but instead I provide encouraging comments, pose questions as prompts for them to look at an issue in a different light, or show empathy for what they have experienced. Although this was my choice, my students often did not like this practice because some of them felt that being a “good writer” meant being a proficient grammarian. From these response papers, many students and I started one-on-one dialogues. Students like Sofia used these dialogues to engage some of the race issues I had brought up in previous class sessions. For example, in response to an essay about remedial education, Sofia confessed, she was placed in remedial classes at a young age. I posed the question, as to whether she thought this was racially motivated. In her response, she mentioned that although she did not want to sound racist, it seemed suspicious that most of the students in her developmental writing class were students of color. As our communication continued through these reading responses, I saw that her writing became stronger.

As the semester continued, she often spoke her mind in her reading responses as well as in class discussions. Toward the end of the semester, while discussing the portrayal of women and minorities in mass media, Sofia initiated a class discussion on the portrayal of Latinas as either sex objects or maids. She did not hesitate during

the discussion, but rather was forthright in her opinions about how the dominant culture defines Mexican women as objectified sexual objects or domestic workers. She placed the blame for this at the feet of a dominant culture controlled by white men. One comment she made was very critical and seemed to be directed right at me, both in terms of content and her nonverbal delivery of the message which was physically directed at my body. She stated, “I know there are a lot of good white men out there who recognize these problems, but they do nothing about it.” Sofia’s comment was so meaningful to me in terms of my own self-reflection as an anti-racist instructor. While Sofia was discussing media and the dominant Latina image, there were direct implications from her statement for my own teaching. I realized that while I may recognize that I have white male privileges, and even can name a few of those privileges, I was left with the sober reality that I do little to disrupt a system that provides me those privileges. As the semester ended, I felt encouraged to explore new antiracist pedagogical practices—ones in which I not only recognize my privilege, but also find ways to give up those privileges, to whatever extent that is possible. I am hopeful that my pedagogical practices somehow empowered Sofia to speak and write about issues she felt strongly about. While Sofia’s experience in my class seemed to be a positive one, I am not so optimistic about the several other Latinos in my class who continued to remain very quiet over the course of the semester.

Color-Attentive Approaches to Teaching Writing

As evidenced in Victoria and Michael’s case studies, their classrooms were not race neutral contexts. Even when not intentionally discussing race, Victoria’s class nonetheless participated in “white talk” and white cultural bonding. This “white talk,” especially because it was never identified as such during the class discussion, served as the unspoken cultural norm in the classroom. White talk serves to inconspicuously keep white students’ experiences, both cultural and linguistic, at the center of classroom practices, while simultaneously limiting the ways ethnic and linguistic “others” can logically participate. Left unanalyzed, the white talk in Victoria’s classroom likely flies under the radar of white participants and is rendered as business as usual. After all, Victoria was merely taking class attendance.

Unlike Victoria, Michael purposely discussed race in his writing classroom. It is important to point out, however, that the decision to openly discuss race does not necessarily lead to the disabling of racism. To the contrary, classroom discussions on race may act to invite the reproduction of racist discourses. As Michael explained in his case study, his invitation to talk about white privilege and his own admission that he is a benefactor of white privilege did not produce racial harmony in his classroom. Rather, white students dominated talk time and reiterated racial rhetoric that served to silence the students of color in the class. Ultimately,

Michael's discussion on race and white privilege was with the white students in his class, who authoritatively claimed racism does not exist, and if anything, people of color have advantages given to them through programs like affirmative action. If nothing else had been done, this discussion on race would have done nothing more than reestablish a racial hierarchy in class, with white students not only speaking on behalf of their own racial experiences but also on that of people of color. Similar to the effects of the colorblind logic, this "race talk" discredits students' of color experiences of racism and likely resulted in their silence during this discussion. Michael, however, did not drop the race issue there. Rather, he used the open class discussion to plant the seed in the minds of students of color that he was critical about racial issues and could potentially serve as their ally. Michael's one-on-one interactions with students of color provided a potential "safe space" for students of color, as seemed to be the case for Sofia, to critically discuss race. The white students, however, never did engage critically with the issue of race.

In both case studies, Victoria and Michael engage in pedagogical practices that attempt to debunk the colorblind approach to teaching writing, and experience varying degrees of success. What is clear from these case studies is that antiracist pedagogies are never simple or complete. Rather, writing instructors must be intentionally reflective on their pedagogical practices and constantly adjust their practices to address newly realized forms of whiteness and/or racism. Important here is that writing instructors must first seek to understand how, rather than if, race operates in their writing classrooms. With this knowledge, writing instructors can develop strategies to displace practices that allocate privilege to some students while marginalizing others. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, inattention to issues of race, also known as colorblindness, ignores the unique set of experiences students of color and linguistic minorities bring to the writing classroom, including cultural knowledge (e.g., biculturalism), language competencies, and experiences with racism. An instructor's inattention to race also allows him/her to remain unaware of how racial discourses are produced in his/her classroom and to what effect. In our efforts to construct writing classrooms that are receptive to all students' experiences, we need to enact pedagogies of inclusion. That is, our pedagogical practices and curricula need to be inclusive of students of color and/or linguistic minority students' cultural and linguistic resources as well as include racial analyses that take into account how racial constructs shape students lives inside and outside the writing classroom.

Conclusion

The blindness in the colorblind approach to teaching writing does not shut down racism, but rather metaphorically closes our eyes and our consciousness to the ways

race actually works in our classrooms. Ironically, despite its meritocratic intentions, the colorblind logic inconspicuously reinscribes the status quo. In this article we urge writing instructors to become more color attentive in their classroom practices. The move to become more color attentive involves including texts that validate the cultural and linguistic knowledge all students bring into our classrooms and analyze how race is embodied in the discourses and practices students and instructors produce in the classroom. While the antiracist approach best meets these expectations, we caution educators from uncritically assuming that any approach will help them achieve a status of non-racism in their classrooms. Perhaps the most important lesson we can take from Victoria and Michael's narratives is that writing instructors can make progress in their antiracist endeavors, but they cannot completely debunk racism in their classrooms. Clearly, Victoria and Michael identify themselves as antiracists and adopt antiracist pedagogical practices in their writing classrooms; however, as they acknowledge, they can never work outside the logic of racism and white privilege.

Notes

1. Pseudonym.
2. A Mexican sitcom that focused on the mischievous actions of the apartment complex tenants, but it especially focused on "Chavo" a child who lived in apartment number eight.

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