Chapter 3
Using Film to Develop Preservice Teachers' Racial Literacy in a Predominantly White Institution

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ABSTRACT

Unlike reading a traditional text, where readers rely on their own experiences and interpretations to understand another's point of view, film is an evocative tool that invites individuals to develop powerful connections to diverse stories. In this chapter, the authors, two teacher educators—one Black and one white—intentionally used film as core text to develop preservice teachers' (PSTs) racial literacy in a Master of Arts in Teaching "diversity" course. Running the course as a journey of discovery, the authors used film-based texts to provoke thought, prompt self-reflection, and ignite inquiry into the relationship between power and identity, guiding PSTs through a self-excavation process. By reflecting on their own racial literacy development and placing their distinct perspectives and experiences in conversation with one another, the authors collaboratively ground their pedagogy in five key elements: (1) creating safe spaces, (2) reading film as text, (3) engaging in critical conversations, (4) practicing self-reflection, and (5) presenting inquiry results in authentic ways.

INTRODUCTION

When reflecting on her personal teaching practices, bell hooks (1996) noted how she came to the realization that her students "learned more about race, sex and class from movies than from all the theoretical

literature [she] was urging them to read" (p. 3). Indeed, film is a powerful tool for engaging preservice teachers (PSTs) to interrogate their identities and their understanding of diversity. This chapter unpacks the use of film as a tool to develop PSTs' racial literacy.

In this context, the term *film* is used to describe various film-based sources, including feature films, documentaries, internet videos, commercials and advertisements, and public service announcements. The authors intentionally used film as core course text in a course titled "Diversity in Schools, Families, and Communities," a course that might be seen as meeting a "diversity" requirement in a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program. The authors – one Black and one white – taught this course across three summers in a predominantly white institution (PWI). Their distinct perspectives ground the conversation in this chapter; their collaboration grounds the pedagogy that is shared.

Reckoning with Race as an Identity

Cathryn

As a Black woman who grew up in a low-income, Black urban community, I attended under-resourced and overcrowded public schools, and then navigated an affluent, predominantly white private secondary school. I witnessed firsthand the realities of educational inequity and systemic racism as I came-of-age though I had not yet possessed the language or critical consciousness to name what was happening. But trauma was brewing and ensuing. It wasn't until decades later that I would begin to grapple with the untold stories of my racial identity development—stories riddled with pride, shame, joy, mourning, and most of all, resilience.

My teacher education program, housed in a PWI, was the first academic institution that invited me to think about my lived experience and put it in conversation with the experiences of others. I read texts like Lies My Teacher Told Me and Unequal Childhoods and listened to my peers as they discovered their whiteness for the first time. The concept of their racial discovery in adulthood was uncanny to me because there was not a single day that went by when the world did not make me remember my Blackness. I also understood how dangerous it was for white folx to navigate through their lives in racial oblivion, unable to read the world, see inequities, or confront their privilege while simultaneously wanting to "save" children and change the world.

My story was different than theirs, and my presence alone was a form of resistance against systemic oppressions that taught me I didn't belong in places like these. I don't know if my classmates got all they needed out of the program. I can't say whether or not they were ready for allyship and activism or whether they entered into educational spaces and caused harm to students they couldn't fully see. I can say that the trauma that I had carried up to that point had not been unpacked, analyzed, addressed, resolved, or healed, and it would continue to weigh on me, always preventing me from tapping into a higher self that could truly evoke change—the higher self that could truly encounter freedom.

Years later, I would return to the same university to pursue doctoral studies in education. This time, I operated with the utmost intention about what I learned and who I learned it from. It became critical

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