Teaching Power Relations in Graduate Education: Reconciling Teacher Social Identity with Authenticity and Credibility

The purpose of this study is to apply a self-study research methodology to seek out insights into the relationship between teacher social identity and student perceptions of teacher authenticity and credibility. The research question for this study is: How does teacher social identity intersect with authenticity and credibility when teaching about relations? The research problem for this study is grounded in the complexity of teaching power relations in graduate education to adult learners. I want to determine if my teaching practices are appropriate for a curriculum that examines diversity, multi-culturalism and social justice education. My social identity is white, woman, cis-gendered, with an invisible learning disability (dyslexia), middle class, educated, Christian and English speaking. My social location, linked to my social identity, affords me a privileged space in a complex web of intersecting identities as I hold the privileged position of a university professor.

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon self-study literature to inform the reflective and analytical framework of a practice of analysis grounded in self-reflection (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Laboskey, 2004; Loughran, 2002, 2004, 2006; Russell & Loughran, 2007; Pinnegar, 1998; Samaras & Freese, 2006). The literature of developing teacher identity in relation to student's perceptions of authenticity and credibility also supports the analysis in this study (Brookfield, 2002, 2013, 2014; Case, 2007; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Smith, Kashubeck-West, Payton & Adams, 2017).

The context of the study is diverse in itself. All of the courses in this study are graduate level courses in M.Ed. Programs. Half of the courses were taught fully online

and half of the courses were taught in a face-to-face flipped classroom model. I am both the designer and the instructor of all of the courses. As graduate students, the participants in this study are adult learners, many work full time in education, many work as K-12 teachers. In all cases, the Diversity in Education Course is a core required course. Students in the study are both domestic (online) and international students (online and face-to-face).

The methods for this study are drawn from Brookfield's (2010) method of critical analysis of teaching practice. In this particular study, the data is drawn from the lens of students (student course evaluations). At the end of each course, I received a summary of the quantitative and qualitative data from the course evaluations. The qualitative and quantitative data from the course evaluations are the data sets for this study. The data is collected from three sets of student evaluations of teaching in face to face courses and three sets of data from online courses. This study applies a thematic analysis of the data sets following Creswell's (2005) framework for data analysis.

Ethics clearance was not required by the participating institutions, as student course evaluations are anonymous and do not require ethics approval when used as data. Ethical concerns in teacher research exist, although some proponents assume the stance that since the study is of 'self' there are no ethical concerns. Self-study is insider research, where the researcher is positioned inside the study, a position of particular privilege (Manke, 2010). This study is sensitive to the ethical concerns of self-study research.

The findings for this study indicate that the social identity of the teacher is related to student's perceptions of teacher authenticity and credibility. The literature supports the

findings (Smith et. al, 2017) and provides guidelines for teachers to connect theory to practice (Brookfield, 2014; Smith et. al., 2017). The findings suggest that pedagogical practices need to be sensitive to social identity during a course on power relations in education. A sub finding of the study suggests that the social identity and social location of self as teacher impacts authenticity and credibility of teacher for students (Brookfield, 2017). Further study is required on the relationship between teacher identity and teaching practice when teaching diversity courses in education to graduate students. Preliminary conclusions indicate that self-study is an appropriate theoretical and methodological framework for this research.

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