

Paper presented at AARE Conference
November 29-December 2, 2010
Melbourne, Australia

Beyond the colour line: post-race theory as a research framework in education

Satoshi Sanada*

Ph. D. Student

School of Education, James Cook University, Cairns, Australia

The essentiality and centrality of race persists as a cultural norm in education research. While critical race theory (CRT) has successfully addressed the unaccounted pedagogical biases which created structural and cultural disadvantages for students of minority backgrounds, it has not provided adequate discussion on how to wrestle with the perplexing concept of race. A limitation of CRT studies which uses minority counter-stories and other personal narratives as a research framework (Gillborn, 2009) is that discussions of race becomes restricted to a particular type of racial discourse which focuses on *difference*, *otherness*, separatism and victimhood (Litowitz, 2009).

Minority discourses tend to portray race and ethnicity as fixed, unitary and essential category, although this is not necessarily how people of racial minority and mixed-race groups perform and experience race (Dewan, 2008; Weedon, 2004). Complexity, fluidity and multidimensionality of individual identities are compromised through ethnographic inquiries which *construct* people's racialised identities (Nayak, 2006). Through this process, binaries of "good / bad" and "non-white victims / guilty whites" also continue to be reproduced and emphasised (Zink, 2007), and they can become a barrier to structural study of race and racism, as researchers' motives may be subverted by "personal concerns over how they are perceived as individuals" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 264). A Need for evaluating the way we, as educators and education researchers, view race and conduct race researches has been suggested (Pollock, 2004; Warmington, 2009).

This paper will focus on contemporary discourses of race (see Spencer, 2006) and address constraints and paradoxes which race researchers have faced in dealing with concepts of race, ethnicity and culture. Drawing on an emerging theoretical perspective called *post-race* which "offer[s] an opportunity to experiment, to re-imagine and to think outside the category of race" (Nayak, 2006, p. 427), I will discuss pedagogical benefits and methodological importance of challenging the category of race itself, and of questioning whether there is a gap between 'race' as represented in educational research and race as "a lived experience, a lived relationship" (Warmington, 2009, p. 283). Critical discussion of applying post-race perspective in educational research in Australian context has not been offered. It will contribute to important contemporary discussions on educational policy, social integrity, racism, and national identity.

* Email: satoshi.sanada@jcu.edu.au

Introduction

Being able to teach ethnically diverse student groups effectively is a professional requirement for all Australian teachers. One in four Australians has a language background other than English; that is, they have at least one parent for whom English is a second language. Twenty per cent of the population speaks a language other than English at home and there are two hundred different languages, including Indigenous languages, spoken in Australia. Thus, understanding the needs of their ethnically and culturally diverse classes, understanding when ethnicity does and doesn't matter in school, and understanding how and when to talk about ethnicity, is important teacher knowledge.

(Santoro, 2005, "When does race matter?: Teachers engaging in 'race' talk")

I rarely find an English word as discursively and controversially used as 'race'. In the document quoted above, Santoro uses the word 'race' equivocally with 'ethnicity' and 'culture'; no explanation is required here. 'Ethnicity' and 'culture' are often used to substitute 'race' in public, political and academic discourses, but 'race' is also used as a marker of physical difference and sometimes in reference to nationality (Spencer, 2006). The tendency of writers to deviate from using the 'R-word' and deploy less tendentious 'ethnicity' and 'culture' is a known contemporary phenomenon in societies across the world, including Australia and many of the European countries (Gunaratnam, 2003; Pollock, 2004; Spencer, 2006; Warmington, 2009). But why does 'race' continue to haunt our worldview and social inquiry, especially in today's ostensibly anti-racist and multiculturalist political climate? And how are we justified in persistently using 'race' categories when we (supposedly) educate in a multicultural society with many people of 'mixed-race', 'mixed-heritage' (Dewan, 2008) and 'hyphenated' (Tsiolkas, 1997) backgrounds? These are important methodological and pedagogical questions.

I am a classroom teacher at a state secondary school in Melbourne's Western Metropolitan region. The school is renowned for a high enrolment of international students and students from non-English speaking backgrounds, some of them with very limited experience of formal education prior to arriving in Australia. Students generally seem happy to be at school and teacher-student relationships are positive, but there is always a sense of hopelessness and apathy when it comes to discussing academic achievement and general work culture around the school. "Things just don't work here," I hear from my colleagues over and over, "I mean, look at our clientele."

As I am a postgraduate student who is interested in 'race' in education, it is always tempting to analyse the situation at our school through the 'race' lens. One such way is to attribute the low achievement of students to the lack of 'white' privileges and cultural capital, as well as the use of Eurocentric pedagogy which 'fails to recognise rich heritage that the students bring into classrooms' and 'excludes the ways of knowing and learning apart from that of the dominant white groups'. After all, this is how I was explicitly taught to "critically" engage with cultural diversity in schools during my preservice teacher education between 2003 and 2007. Based on my observation of inequalities (and, conveniently, I already know that I could look into any of the classrooms at school to find a sufficient amount of evidences) I could perhaps comment on deficit views that the teachers carry towards students of 'non-white' backgrounds, and discuss how this contributes to the construction and reification of school culture and discourses which are negatively constitutive to such students' self-concepts as learners. I may conclude that the impact of race permeates

through our school, although not overtly, and make a few prescriptive points such as the need for recruiting more ‘minority’ teachers—because they *are* going to be positive role models for ‘minority’ students by virtue of their commonalities in ‘race’—and need to celebrate students’ ‘racial’ identities more. *This is a great plan. It ticks many boxes, too: political correctness, compassion for the less privileged, and empowerment of minority groups.*

There are, however, reasons why I cannot write a such paper. Since arriving in Australia as an exchange student eight years ago (I was seventeen years old then) I have constantly been perplexed not only about the acts of racism but also the conceptual validity of ‘race’ and racial thinking. Based on frustrating experiences of constantly being imposed and confined in ‘Japanese’ or ‘Asian’ identity and being seen through reductionist and essentialist gaze, I *know* that much of ‘racial’ thinking is a flawed social practice that (at least) I would be better off without. How ethical, then, is it for me to represent the teachers and students around me via the very mode of categorisation that I strongly despise, and to arbitrarily place them into ‘racial’ categories and binaries? And furthermore, how could I possibly deploy, and base my scholarly worldview on, the concept that I am not yet convinced about? Of course, my opinion would be different if there is a compelling *logical* argument as to why the importance of ‘race’ should be assumed *a priori* in our analysis. Unfortunately, I have not been able to come across any.

Much has been discussed and published about racial inequalities in education. However, the place and status of ‘race’ in pedagogies and research methodologies remain unclear, and I speculate it would be a highly controversial yet important topic in the coming years. This gives me two main purposes that I am writing this paper for. Firstly, to outline how I, based on my experience as an education migrant, came to be interested in post-race theory. And secondly, to discuss potential methodological benefits of post-race theory in the contemporary educational research, with an anticipation for inviting critical discussions and evaluations.

‘Leaving home’: towards and beyond ‘race’

In this section I will briefly provide an account of how I came to be interested in post-race theory. Through the process I will outline how I perceive post-race theory to be different from Critical Race Theory (CRT) which is commonly adapted in the discussion of student achievement in many of the Western countries.

In my honours thesis I used autoethnography to analyse my account of moving to Australia as a young student and coming to see myself as an object of racialisation, a being whose essence was my perceived ‘race’ (e.g., non-white, non-Australian, Japanese, Asian) rather than my personhood. As soon as I stepped out of a cultural context where my physical attributes were considered to fit within the norm, my body suddenly became a signifier of my identity, which was given substance through its *difference*. Based on the experience of identity transition from the dominant (as a “Japanese male” in Japanese society) to the marginal, I came to realise how arrogant and ignorant I was prior to leaving Japan (“a frog in a well”, as a Japanese maxim says). This made me question my previous attachment to unearned privileges as a member of the dominant group. Consequently, while I had a choice to continue to live in Australia as a ‘Japanese male’ by choosing to locate myself within enclosed Japanese communities—which would have allowed me to retain some of the physical, cultural, linguistic and gender privileges that I previously held—I grew sceptical of such motive for racial identification. I came to feel that any attempt to identify with a

racial group was ultimately problematic, as it would indicate my desire for privileges through the means of placing myself within a culture where out-groups are constructed, not through my own hard work or distinctions that I myself have earned. To me, racial identity was nothing that I should be proud about since it was simply given to me upon birth or arbitrarily imposed by others, and hence, nothing that I should be judged or discriminated for. Equally, it is not something that I should utilise to exert power over other people.

Despite my desire to emancipate myself from my ‘Japaneseness’—by trying to live a racially and culturally non-segregated life in Australia and to become a classroom teacher—I found myself unable to escape the identity politics of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’. I sought ways to theoretically analyse my experience of being ‘race’-bound, but was unable to locate any theoretical framework or bodies of literature which aligned with my stance. In the second year subject called ‘Education for cultural diversity’, my fellow students and I were taught to adapt a particular worldview which closely resembled Critical Race Theory (CRT). As far as I can understand, it is a perspective which aims at recognising and problematising instances of racial inequality which are “normal, not aberrant” (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv; cited in Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 21) and thus overlooked or silenced in the dominant social discourses. CRT recognises narratives as a valuable research framework to provide “stories from the bottom” to offer accounts of “real” manifestations of racism in the white societies (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009). Much of writings about Australian students of minority backgrounds that I was introduced to adapted a similar perspective, where education was viewed as a ‘white’ or ‘European’ enterprise which were colonialist in essence and inevitably disadvantaged those who did not come from such backgrounds. These accounts readily made sense to me, as I could see myself to be belonging to the minority category, but I also felt they were quite detached from my own experience. Furthermore, even though I strongly agreed with its valuation of minority narratives, I felt CRT presented many critical problems and was inadequate for my purpose.

The foremost critical problem that I see in ‘race’ driven frameworks such as CRT is their inability to consistently demarcate what kinds or aspects of phenomena can be considered racial or non-racial. During the course ‘Education for cultural diversity’ a university tutor explained in a tutorial (in front of more than twenty pre-service teachers) that my academic success at the university was due to my Japanese culture and values: the ‘Japanese’, according to the tutor, shared much of values with the ‘whites’. The striking thing was that the comment was made after my explanation of typically ‘racial’ disadvantages that I faced; that I had only lived in Australia for just over two years at the time and had no experience of Western style of education prior to that; that my English language skills were relatively poor (I was the only international student from a Non-English-Speaking-Background in the degree at the time); and that my parents were not affluent so I needed to work long hours at a local pub throughout weekends to support myself. The *correct* discourse endorsed throughout the course was that many minority groups such as Indigenous Australians struggled academically as they lacked in academic culture and values that ‘whites’ (and in the tutor’s eyes, ‘Asians’ or ‘Japanese’) possessed.

It is questionable whether purposeful ‘racialisation’ of observable phenomena and the appeal to cultural explanation is necessarily a methodologically sound and ethical move. This is because any attempt to explain student achievement or schooling experience through ‘race’ requires too many unwarranted premises and arbitrary justifications about impacts of ‘race’. The tutor simply asserted that my ‘Japanese’ cultural privilege (emphasis on education, which aligns with that of ‘whites’) alone

was enough to supersede the commonly acknowledged ‘disadvantages’ that I shared with many ‘minority students’. Factors such as my non-white appearance, lack of understanding in Australian educational system and common pedagogies, poor financial status and ESL background may certainly have registered as a source of disadvantage, but not as much as my ‘Japaneseness’ benefited me.

One would easily notice here that the same theory about ‘race’ can just as well explain why I could have been *unsuccessful* in the same educational setting. All that needs to be done arrive at the desired contention is to use the same sets of ‘advantages’ and ‘disadvantages’ as a premise, but arbitrarily rendering either set to be more significant. This is a serious issue for researchers and educators because it actually reduces the status of the theory by allowing to be irrefutable. This is partly because how much influence a person’s ‘racial’ characteristics have on his or her academic achievement and general social experience is never justifiable, and partly because it ignores a range of other factors that would be as equally if not more important and constructive to consider when discussing student achievement, such as students’ virtues and *individual* schooling experience (which may certainly be affected by false assumptions of parents, teachers and students themselves about ‘race’). Still, CRT framework could be used to argue that what are meant by ‘virtues’, such as self-discipline, temperance and resilience, or what counts as literature, numeracy, mathematics, logic, and ethics are also culturally constructed and normalised, hence privilege students of particular ‘races’ over others. Thus the ‘racial’ explanation could go on *ad hoc* to explain why *any* student can simultaneously succeed *and* fail educationally—in any given context, without even researchers meeting the students and learning about their lives—by virtue of his or her ‘race’. This resembles the situation of what Karl Popper (2002 [1962]) called pseudoscience:

A Marxist could not open a newspaper without finding on every page confirming evidence for his interpretation of history; not only in the news, but also in its presentation—which revealed the class bias of the paper—and especially of course in what the paper did *not* say.

(p. 46; emphasis original)

Of course, as Popper himself clarifies, a theory being “pseudo-science” in his definition does not say anything about its utilitarian or aesthetic value, or its acceptability. It is undeniable that theories such as CRT can be used to promote social equity and cohesion, and is absurd to seek truth and precision (at least in scientific sense) in this type of social inquiries—what we can empirically observe and analyse is grossly limited (e.g., we can observe students’ behaviour in classroom but not the influence of ‘race’ or ‘culture’). However, the problem here is that precautions with ‘race’ and ‘race’ data can constrain what can be observed and discussed about the fundamental topic it deals with [‘race’], and significantly affects researchers’ view; this can be a serious methodological issue. I will outline an example by once again referring to the account I provided earlier. From the tutor’s perspective—whose duty is to pursue the view where ‘race’ plays a significant role in explaining student achievement—it would have been *desirable* that I was treated as, and necessarily as, a racialised subject. This way, whether I was educationally successful or not would have made little significance as far as the status of ‘race’ theory goes. If I (a ‘Japanese’ student) was unsuccessful at an Australian university, this would have generated a good ground for one to criticise the institution for not adequately catering for my (read: ‘Asian’ or ‘Japanese’) needs and for privileging ‘white’ epistemology or

‘Western’ conventions of writing and assessments. However, even if I turned out to be successful, researchers could still come up with *ad hoc* ‘racial’ explanation (i.e., that the ‘Japanese’ are culturally advantaged) to save their theories from refutation. This type of analysis can mask complexity and diversity of minority experience. Not every ‘racial minority’ wishes to see themselves or be seen in such way. Some do live with strong sense of racial pride, or even psychological dissociation from the ‘whites’, while some (although they do see how ‘race’ does impact their lives) attempt to transcend the simplistic, reductionist and essentialist categories that they are assigned.

Finally, race-based research framework evoke an ethical concern that is shared by scholars who express scepticisms about affirmative actions in the US (see e.g., McWhorter, 2000; Sowell, 2004; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). A dilemma here is it is difficult to demarcate to which extent and for what purpose, if at all, it is acceptable for researchers, educators and policy makers to arbitrarily assign racial identities to people, especially when they are perfectly aware that interpellation of such identities is unjustified and grossly inaccurate.

Delgado (2009) is critical of ‘race’ based hiring practice as it treats non-white applicants as a means to an end: namely, racialised bodies which operate as visible symbols of social equity and cohesion. Such practice is premised on the role model argument, where preferential hiring and college admission of members of certain racial minority groups is justified by positive impacts these individuals are expected to have on other people of the same group. For example, an increased presence of the same-race peers would enhance academic performance of minority students (see, e.g., Cole & Barber, 2003; Delgado, 2009; McWhorter, 2000; Sowell, 2004, Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; for criticism and refutations of the role model argument). A similar line of argument that we see in Australia is that we need more non-white or minority teachers and adults to work at school to encourage minority students to succeed (see, e.g., Allard & Santoro, 2006; Sarra, 2007). Hidden yet fundamental premises of role model arguments are that *people see that the social world is divided up in accordance to ‘racial’ categories* and that *people look up to and feel more comfortable around people of the same physically observable ‘race’*. This is a difficult situation of us as we feel morally uneasy about perpetuating racialist thinking—separatist, ethnocentric or ‘stick to own kinds’ discourse—yet at the same time are aware that preconceived ideas about ‘race’ can be an effective tool for facilitating short-term educational objectives (see e.g., Sarra, 2007).

These concerns make the act of ‘race’ research a difficult task. In my case, what I needed was a research framework which recognises not only the unique and often silenced perspective of minorities (CRT does this well), but also various manifestations and complexities of racial thinking and categorisation, exercised by *both* the majority and the minority groups. Such framework should explicitly critique the validity of racial thinking and interrogate taken for granted assumptions about ‘race’, instead of treating the essentiality and eternality of ‘race’ as *a priori*, or an essential tool for challenging the status quo. It was clear to me that cultural struggles of minority individuals are not necessarily against the dominant groups such as ‘whites’, and trying to interpret their experience in such binarised term could be grossly inaccurate and misleading. The same ‘struggle’ could be interpreted as being against the dominant culture where ‘race’ is given such a status and significance as an essential category to define people’s social identity. Hence, critiquing or deconstructing the cultural dominance of ‘white’ Australians (as is done via CRT) is a possible starting point, but not a necessary condition for combating racial inequalities in our society. It is possible to discuss the issues of power and privilege without

appealing to ‘white’ oppressor / ‘non-white’ oppressed discourse, hence reiterating the ideas of ‘race’ and boundaries created by it. By focusing on my experience of leaving Japan, I questioned our attachment to the familiar cultures, values, ideas and unearned privileges, and inability to emancipate from them. I was convinced that such self-reflexive approach to preconceived beliefs about the essentiality and importance of ‘race’ could lead to an interesting approach to answer many conundrums that we face when discussing education in a culturally diverse context.

I had just submitted my honours thesis when I came across Anoop Nayak’s article in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, titled ‘After race: Ethnography, race, and post-race theory’ (2006). According to Nayak, post-race theory treats race as an arbitrary sign constructed into existence through social acts and political representation. Nayak (2006) draws on Derrida’s assertion that the existence of signs such as race are entirely contingent to the power of repetition (Derrida & Kamuf, 1991). Every time racial categories are used in research as a meaningful marker of personal identity and traits (and are read by audiences accordingly) the status of ‘race’ is confirmed, legitimised and reified within a particular research paradigm or discipline.

‘Race’ is considered here as a product of ethnographic encounter (Nayak, 2006). Rather than being predetermined and existing “out there”, the significance of ‘race’ is defined and fixed by ethnographers who actively seek ‘racialised’ data in research. Hence, post-race as a research perspective enables alternative approaches to studies of ‘race’, and critical evaluation of how studies on social diversity are structured and carried out. Much of the existing frameworks in racial studies, such as Critical Race Theory, have asserted a conceptual validity of ‘race’ in seeking and constructing racialised descriptions of inequalities—often take the form of narratives and stories from minority perspectives, or stories “from the bottom”, sometimes called “counterstories” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009)—and to inform the social, legal and political reforms (Gillborn, 2009). On the other hand, scholars who work from post-race perspective would start by interrogating the status of ‘race’ and questioning underlining motives and interests behind racial thinking and use of racial categories.

The ways the term ‘race’ is used in contemporary Western cultural context is important for understanding the post-racial perspective. Until recently, ‘Race’ had been commonly understood as referring to biological and genetic markings of people, although the genetic grounding of racial categorisation was continuously challenged by biological scientists towards the end of the twentieth century (Appiah, 1996 & Templeton, 1998; cited in Zack, 2001). Researchers today tend to use the term, often interchangeably with ‘ethnicity’ (Gunaratnam, 2003), as a convenient signifier of a combination of multiple intertwined social categories. Spencer (2006) asserts that “different uses of the term [‘race’] can be traced within historically specific discourses” (p. 34) and identifies four discourses about ‘race’ which are prevalent today. They are:

- Race as class: socio-economic status or relation to mode of production, or status.
- Race as culture: identification with language, religion, customs, mores [and] encultured characteristics
- Race as ethnicity: use of term ‘race’ inherently; ethnocentric ‘ethnicity’ used interchangeably with race; social choice to identify by natural rather than social criteria
- Race as nation: similar to early concept of lineage, rallying force behind nationalist movements

(Spencer, 2006, p. 35)

From the post-race stance, ‘race’ can be treated as a *sous rature*, a signifier under erasure, kept alive because of the semiotic necessity. However, this “necessity” is, as Saussure argued, arbitrarily determined by the socio-cultural and historical context in which the word is used (Nöth, 1990). Hence, racial thinking and categorisation are best described as forms of culturally reified practice and mediational tool (Warmington, 2009); it is only within our societies’ dominant culture that ‘race’ continues to be deployed and is treated to be something unquestionable in the public discourse, without much scepticism expressed by thinkers such as Marx, Weber, Althusser, Sartre, among many others. The recent trend of ‘PC’ (Political correctness) is one manifestation of such culture; in order to avoid the charge of being seen to be assimilationist, one is compelled to support certain degree of relativism (postmodernist discourse becomes a convenient tool here) and actively value racial identities of minorities, even though logical and epistemological flaws in racial thinking, generalisation and stereotypes, are clearly recognisable. Furthermore, in order to value, respect and tolerate each others’ and our own ‘racial’ identity—so that we can be seen to be “multicultural”—we require ‘race’ to operate as a clearly recognisable conceptual boundary.

Methodological benefits of post-race theory

As I have argued in the previous section, one aspect of CRT (and like theories) that I have problem is its tendency to reify the conceptual status of ‘race’. Such works often involve using ‘whites’ (or any dominant group in a given context) as a central reference point to map out the positions of minorities on the margins. Binaries of ‘insider’ / ‘outsider’ or ‘oppressor’ / ‘oppressed’ binary are constructed as necessary conceptual tools. “Counter-stories” are given values within CRT based on their capacity for “exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009, p. 138). According to Delgado (1998, quoted by Solórzano & Yosso, 2009) “oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation” (p. 2436). This movement spawned many “writers of colour” to speak up for their own groups.

I have always felt suspicious about underlining motives behind self-claimed minority scholarships where researchers categorise themselves racially in order to write for “their” people and students. Such scholarship—one form of “autoethnography” as defined by Reed-Danahay (1997)—achieves its effect by constructing ‘inside’ views about what it *is* like to be on the ‘outside’, and what it *is* like being Chicana/os, African Americans, Asians or Indigenous Australians in the ‘white’ societies. Narratives and counter-stories then become devices through which clusters of groups seek power in a given social context by appealing to each of their own majoritarian ideologies while at the same time actively locating themselves as “oppressed minorities”. This seems paradoxical because CRT generally makes out that it opposes the use of the majoritarian voice. As a result, such self-claimed “oppressed minority” scholars are *confirming* the view that it is right to construct arbitrary racial identities and boundaries—that are necessarily exclusionary of Others (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1991)—and for each group to use such identities to pursue own interests.

Likewise, Litowiz (2009) is sceptical of the contemporary culture around minority scholarship:

it is somewhat ironic that so many self-titled “outsider” are sitting on the faculties at top law schools and publishing in the best law journals. When seventy-five percent on the articles on civil rights are written by “outsiders,” then the term is no longer meaningfully applied. The problem here is not only that the term “outsider” is being misused, but more broadly that it is increasingly hard to find an outside to the “outsider” view.

(p. 307)

Litowiz (2009) observes that a reckless utilisation of minority voices has resulted in “a somewhat simplistic universe of oppressors and oppressed, sketched in black and white” (p. 307). This observation aligns with the situation in educational research where binarised representations of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’, ‘white’ and ‘non-white’, and ‘Indigenous’ and ‘non-Indigenous’ are prevalent. Zink (2007) finds that Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Outdoor and Environmental Studies syllabus document constructs “Indigenous knowledge = good” / “non-Indigenous knowledge = bad” binary when discussing the knowledge about the land and native environment. The author argues that it is inherently problematic as Indigenous knowledge and values are fixed and frozen in such a simplistic binary discourse. While binary discourse is used in anti-colonialist discourse (Shahjahan, 2005) as valuable tool, it could be argued as inherently problematic because Indigenous peoples are collectively idealised as a mythical “ecologically noble savage” (Zink, 2007, p. 6) which is a view confirming colonialist perspective. Further, this process of idealisation is premised by beliefs about somewhat essentialist assumption about the connection between ‘race’ and knowledge, values and interests. It assumes that there are distinctive types of knowledge that are exclusive to members of separate ‘racial’ group; hence the construction of ‘Indigenous’ knowledge, ‘Asian’ students, ‘Chicana/o’ values and so forth.

Martin Nakata is one of a few scholars who questions the construction of ‘racialised’ knowledge in education. He observes that “previous curriculum interventions have been designed on the basis of characteristics presumed common to the group, features which in themselves are based on generalised and often essentialised understandings of how ‘cultural difference’ affects learning” (p. 5). He then attempts to reconcile the problem of education for Indigenous Australians by stating that Indigenous students should benefit from but also need to move beyond specifically tailored ‘Indigenous’ curriculum and educational context “to at the very least engage with non-Indigenous cultural norms” (2001, p. 9).

Nakata’s argument is that combining Indigenous ways of knowing and learning with non-Indigenous ways would result in more valuable ways of solving problems, and that “these new ways do not have to require the Indigenous learner to ‘forget’ old ways” (p. 12). I believe this statement of Nakata’s says a lot about the often overlooked assumption behind discussion over ‘culturally appropriate pedagogy’. By asserting that minority students need teachers (preferably of minority backgrounds themselves) who understand and can teach through minority culture and epistemology, we are not only asserting the existence of racially distinct epistemologies but also adapting somewhat assimilationist idea which neglects hybridity and fluidity of human identities. Such assumptions about ‘race’ and identity clearly fails to reflect a contemporary situation about ‘race’ where people are—particularly those who may be classified as ‘mixed-race’—beginning to see themselves, not just societies, to be ‘multicultural’ (Dewan, 2008).

A significant benefit that I see in post-race theory is that it allows researchers to recognise various types of minority experience which had been overlooked. Because we prefer the use of binary sets in our analysis and knowledge acquisition (which is not inherently wrong), if we are adamant about, for example, the ‘white’ dominance, then any stories which do not fit in the ‘white’ view is likely to be treated as an antithesis to this dominance. The danger here is that the *all* minority accounts can then be seen to be unified and collective narrative *against* ‘whites’ (or whatever the dominant group is in a given context). Nuances, complexities and intricate details about the experience of ‘race’ are lost, and anomalies *within* minority discourses are compromised in such writing. It certainly would not capture the kind of minority experience that I have had, of struggling against the society’s assumptions about the essentiality of ‘race’, rather than ‘whites’, and ultimately aiming at emancipation from such identities.

Post-race perspective can also allow researchers to see a newly emerging types of minority discourses that older theories may not be able to capture. Mica Pollock (2004), recalling her study in mid 90s at a racially diverse Californian school, argues that many students that she came in contact with seemed to deal with the idea of ‘race’ in a different manner from the adults around the schools did. She implies that there may be a significant disparity between the ways that young children (of racial minority or mixed-race backgrounds) deal with ‘race’ in everyday life and how adult researchers assume ‘race’ to be in their studies:

Research questions about race and schooling (indeed, about race and youth in general) regularly simplify race like this, by framing racial “identity” and race relations as the property of young people (and primarily young people of color) rather than framing race more accurately as a shared practice of organizing diversity and power that involves people of all ages and “races”.

(p. 29)

Pollock’s argument denotes an important methodological issue for ethnographers to consider. Research data is purposely elicited and constructed by researchers, things like minority narratives and stories are no exception to this (Nayak, 2006). It is outlined in *A handbook for teacher research* by Lankshear and Knobel (2004) that:

data are always already interpreted to a significant extent by the researcher, at and before the point of collection. This happens as the researcher makes procedural decisions about what is being studied (e.g., who to interview and why), as they ‘read’ contexts or processes through the theories that frame their study, and as data are read through their beliefs and assumptions about what is being studied.

(p. 173)

Adaptation of post-race theory allows us to recognise that as we study ‘race’ through a particular set of theories, we align ourselves with particular research paradigms which carry presumptions about how ‘race’ *ought to be* viewed and represented. Since researchers are not often required to question or justify the modes of racial thinking and categorisation that they deploy—for instance, I can conduct a study on ‘Asian experience in Australia’ and never be asked to justify my use of racial categorisation—specific ideas about ‘race’ (which suit the goal that researchers hope to achieve) are reiterated through research designs, participant selections, interview questions, and so forth. Consequently, the meaning and status of ‘race’ becomes fixed

and unquestionable within research communities which share the same analytical lens. For researchers who adopt the likes of Critical Race Theory, as I argued earlier, it is actually *necessary* that research participants and subjects are viewed as racialised beings, as this enables the existence of research data about ‘minority’ or ‘non-white’ experience. Interviews, surveys and other measures are then carried out to elicit narrative accounts of being a member of racial group in such-and-such context, where just about *any* experience or perception of inequality can be explained through ‘race’, or can be *constructed* by adapting ‘race’ lens. Post-race theory can operate as a precautions to this and enables a more balanced inquiry about social inequalities by allowing researchers and participants to speak *out of* or *against* the culture of ‘racial’ thinking and categorisation.

Summary

I began this paper by explaining how my experience of becoming a minority as a young adult has led me to researching about “race” and post-race theory. As far as I can tell, the theory is a relatively new one and does not seem to have gained much recognition in the field of educational research. What I provided here is obviously a sketchy outline of the theory. There are many questions and refutations to be considered, and issues about the theory, ‘race’ and education that I have not been able to include in this paper. I will continue developing my understanding of the post-race theory throughout my postgraduate studies.

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