A MYTH: CREATING SAFE SPACES FOR DISCUSSIONS ABOUT RACE AND RACISM IN CRITICAL GRADUATE SOCIAL WORK CLASSROOMS

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CHOOSING THE RESEARCH TOPIC

Choosing the topic is the most important step of the research process.

The process was influenced by:

- My lived experience within the critical graduate social work classroom
- Recognizing that what occurs on the micro level translates into macro levels of social work practice
THE NEXT STEPS

Examining the literature
- Ask lots of questions
- G A P S?? What’s missing?

Theoretical Perspectives
  a.) Critical Race Theory (CRT)
  - Centers race; emphasizes the voices and experiences of people of color
  - Challenges dominant epistemologies
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

A Fanonian Theory

- Rules and guidelines created within the classroom based on mutual respect and minimal conflict, promote safety for people of color and white people: A MYTH

- In fact, the term “safety” is misleading because:
  - it creates a false sense of security and false expectations
  - it confuses safety to mean comfort which often means that white individuals are the ones made to feel safe
A FANONIAN PERSPECTIVE

“anger, hostility frustration, and pain are not to be avoided under the banner of safety, which only produces a "culture of silence" (Freire, 1993, emphasis added). They are attributes that are to be recognized on the part of both whites and people of color in order to engage in a process that is creative enough to establish new forms of social existence, where both parties are transformed.” (Leonardo & Porter, 2010, p. 149).
OPERATIONALIZING THE TERMS: KEY WORDS OF STUDY

1. Re-defining SAFETY
2. RACE: conceptualized in relational terms
3. Listening for the SILENCES created in the critical social work classroom around race dialogues
   ▪ “the most powerful rhetoric for maintaining an existing scheme of privilege will be silent” (Crenshaw, 1997, p.260).
DESIGN AND METHODS

Research Methodology
 The phenomenological research approach
 Qualitative study
  Data Collection: Purposeful sampling
  Participants: 4 women of color who were current or recent graduates (within 5 years) of York University’s Masters of Social Work Program and 1 race conscious white woman.
FINDINGS

Themes

a) Internal dialogues and Fear
b) Verbal and Nonverbal Racial Microaggressions in the classroom
c) Power and White Privilege: The Function of Silence & Hierarchy of Oppressions
d) Multiple Roles in the Classroom: ‘Not Just a Student
e) Racial Dialogues in the Classroom: A Relational Responsibility
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase knowledge & education about race and racism in the critical graduate social work program
2. Having allies
3. The responsibility of the instructor as facilitator and guide: encouraging students to look deeper into difficult moments
4. Redefining Safety in the Classroom: taking risks, facing fears, sitting with discomfort and unlearning what we think we know about the other
IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

• CRT and the Fanonian Perspective have the potential to change the attitudes of students and instructors to engage in racial dialogues beyond the classroom

• Better equips ALL students to ally with racialized clients in the social work field

• Graduate faculty of social work programs can evaluate whether or not their knowledge base, curriculum and practices reflect commitments to social justice and anti-oppressive social work practice
MY PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS

Inviting....
Your thoughts, comments and questions!

Remember to enjoy the journey!