Introduction: An Analysis of Articles and Key Concepts Featured in the Double Special Issue

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The first article of the Brock Education Journal’s special issue is Spy Dénommé-Welch and Jennifer Rowsell’s (2017) “Epistemologies of Silence.” They provide autoethnographic reflections on how silence manifests through myriad experiences borne of social relations and political realities. The reader learns about how two very separate cultural trajectories, one shaped by Anishinaabe ancestry (Spy) and the second by Irish–British-settler hidden memories (Jennifer), merge temporarily by way of methodologically interrogating epistemologies of silence, although manifested in disparately distinct senses. As Dénommé-Welch explains, my work is a culmination of life experience and artistic practice that builds on multiple art forms and epistemologies, which in part aims to disrupt colonial histories and hegemonic discourses, which are all too often prevalent in the Arts and systems of education. However, not only does this process conceivably present the space(s) to disrupt colonialism, but it also can become a mode used to re-examine the implications of silence and its part in suppressing Indigenous knowledges, histories, and expressions of autonomy. (p. 12)

While looking through the lenses of research conducted, Rowsell articulates the process of unearthing the silencing of Black youth in schools. The coauthors speak to the converges and overlaps from their respective research observations that illuminate how “Western culture has placed great emphasis on the notion of speech/voice, in quite literal and figurative ways, either by emphasizing or demarking separation between ‘dominant’ and ‘minoritized’ voices. This has directly and indirectly contributed to forms of oppression and the subjugation of Indigenous and racialized voices” (p. 13). The authors seek to expose the knowledge gaps among its citizens, as well as the violent nature of colonialism wherein select Euro-colonial narratives and knowledge systems have prevailed and contributed to the mythology of today’s Canada. Building on the notion of fragmentation, and the potentiality for disrupting mythology, together we weave vignettes—snippets and pieces of knowledge—to form a type of narrative of voiced silence, and examine how our combination of vignettes function as a kind of monograph to underscore notions of silence. (p. 14)

The coauthors proceed to offer up a set of methodological research processes for studying and probing silence. Their examination of silence in images lends a connection to Afua Cooper’s study of the image of the burial record for Diana Bastian.

In “‘Deluded and Ruined’”: Diana Bastian—Enslaved African Canadian Teenager and White Male Privilege,” Afua Cooper (2017) provides a historical analysis of “racial and sexual abuse on the Canadian frontier (p. 26).” Bastian’s burial record disrupts the myth that Canada was a
safe haven for southern African American slaves seeking freedom through the Underground Railroad to Canada. As Cooper explains, “when we place Black women at the centre of Canada’s historical and colonial past, we come to a new understanding of the power and privilege White men possessed, and the catastrophic impact it had on Black women’s bodies” (p. 26). Cooper’s analysis of the document critiques the problem that though physically and sexually violated, Bastian’s aggressor did not face any retribution because notions of White privilege and White supremacy deemed Bastian as property of her capture. Cooper states, “Bastian was owned by Loyalist Abraham Cuyler and taken advantage of by George More, one of Cuyler’s friends and colleagues. These men were part of the colonial elite, and therefore in many respects can be described as founding fathers of an emerging Canadian nation” (p. 27).

Jhonel Morvan (2017), in ‘Making Visible and Acting on Issues of Racism and Racialization in School Mathematics,’ disrupts the racialized racist silences that allow student success in the discipline of mathematics to continue to be privileged and accessible to elite students in ways that reproduce the “White power structure” in society. What is of interest in Morvan’s article is the fact that his argument is supported by a Toronto District School Board report that points to the racial inequities regarding school success “that makes such connections clear” and “present as ethical dilemmas that people in all educational settings must deal with on a constant basis” (p. 37). Morvan insists on the importance of galvanizing stakeholders into action. For Morvan, we cannot purport to endorse equity without first acknowledging how inequities occur. Morvan’s article is twofold in its approach: He first highlights how math is racialized then urges stakeholders to go beyond the equity rhetoric by way of his call to action that involves an “ethic of care” and the “ethic of critique.”

The collection of three articles thus far are based in Canada. The next is U.S. based, while the last two are internationally based and adopt a global perspective. Mollie A. Gambone (2017) in “Teaching the Possible: Justice-Oriented Professional Development for Progressive Educators,” examines a forum for the professional development of 800 educators. Gambone’s study is timely in that it delves into the current issues confronting educational professional development organizations. Gambone analyzes the program offered, using qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis as a vehicle for examining questions regarding the organizations’ and participants’ willingness to engage with justice-oriented curriculum. She anchors the rationale for her examination in the following problematic: “providing justice-oriented professional development for progressive educators has historically been a site of tension” (p. 50). The forum under examination is the Progressive Education Network’s 2015 national conference. Gambone’s study is innovative in its use of thematic analysis of the workshop abstracts based on the extant literature. She articulates the urgency of this work as follows:

This study aims to understand how professional development is designed as a site for progressive educators to engage with justice-oriented curricula. Findings indicate that in order for students to be engaged, democratic citizens, they must work alongside role model educators (Giroux & McLaren, 1986) who listen to and honor the truth in perspectives different than their own (Ladson-Billings, 1995). (p. 54)

Gambone’s study is unique, in that it merges the discussion of the research literature on social justice oriented approaches with the work on progressive educators through both content analysis and discourse analysis. She arrives at three themes:

1. utilizing pedagogy, which included teaching techniques for student engagement and learning objectives for the participants to be able to take an idea back to their own context;
Reframing social issues, which encouraged the participants to understand how social issues are commonly framed, then analyze how these issues could be experienced or perceived by others. These sessions highlighted the importance of perspective, historical significance, and societal or political structures that perpetuate inequality;

Understanding diverse perspectives, which delineated specific causes or groups of people for whom sessions aimed to raise awareness. The causes most commonly advocated for were: the environment, LGBT/gender/sexuality issues, disability, community issues, and issues of race and culture. (p. 60)

Gambone offers a research approach that can be used by other activist researchers interested in learning how organizations deliver on opportunities for professional learning among educators, particularly those focused on merging the divisiveness between progressive education on one end and social justice education on the other.

Barbara Rose (2017), in “Moving From Chasm to Convergence: Benefits and Barriers to Academic Activism for Social Justice and Equity,” queries “the difficult process of defining and balancing the worlds of academia and activism, as if each world is on a different side of a chasm that can’t be reached” (p. 68). Rose argues for the importance for standing with institutional change at the structural level. Using Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) methodology, she writes about the trajectory in her thinking toward becoming and living as an academic activist.

In a manner that is both transparent and authentic, Rose expresses both the challenges and affirmations she has witnessed and fought for in both her research endeavors and work toward institutional change. She asserts that view as follows: “I have been influenced by events in both my scholarly and personal lives that reflect points of chasm and convergence” (p. 70). Turning to the research literature, Rose provides examples of activist researchers who have articulated what it means to live in “outsiderhood” and experience the liminality within institutions because of their activism. Such examples used by Rose stem from cultural studies and scholars who have taken on a counternarrative within the discipline itself. The examples are many, including women’s studies and critical race theory. What is evident to Rose is

In addition to academic activists being in a place of liminality, it can be argued that the scholarship of academic activism is similarly situated, lacking theoretical constructs or methodologies that are widely used across disciplines. Although most disciplines have theoretical frameworks that are used by activists within their academic field, the dearth of interdisciplinary theory specific to academic activism isolates academic activists from each other and reduces opportunities to provide examination of collective context, themes, meaning, and strategies. (p. 69)

Rose argues for the uses of SPN across disciplines and points out that it has been utilized to write about the work of activist scholars who support social justice issues in their scholarship and work on the ground.

In “Feminist Scholar-Activism Goes Global: Experiences of ‘Sociologists for Women in Society’ at the UN,” Daniela Jauk argues for public sociology as a means to bridge the gap between “academy and activism.” In fact, she insists that Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS) is an important case example of a bridge between the divide. Jauk’s work serves to unpack the history of SWS’s scholar-activism in and around the UN based on historic documents and publications. I then turn to the research site CSW and lay out themes that emerged from sub-sample of interviews with current or former SWS scholar-activists,
representing experiences and challenges of SWS members’ engagement with UN policy development since the mid-nineties. I demonstrate that SWS does justice to its mission of serving as an activist organization through its work in the global arena. The activism of SWS-members increases visibility of feminist sociology, disrupts hegemonic discourse, and offers opportunities for concrete social change, particularly through linking activism, mentoring, and teaching. (p. 80)

Jauk discusses a subsample that includes 11 interviews with both former and present-day members of SWS as well as those who have been pivotal to SWS contributions at the United Nations. She clearly incorporates her “own white, western, working class, transnational feminist lens to examine the interview transcripts of feminist scholar-activists” and in so doing she “interrogates opportunities and limitations for feminist scholarship activism around the Commission on the Status of Women (p. 80).

We now turn to the pieces published in Understanding and Dismantling Privilege that are part of a Double Special Issue with Brock Education Journal. UDP begins with Taylor Gibson’s (2017) opening address, in which he pays homage to his grandparents and the teachings he came to value as a young child. Gibson is an educator, and his Thanksgiving address educates the listening audience about ancestors’ knowledge as pedagogy. Gibson is followed by a joint Keynote presented by Dr. Eddie Moore, Jr. and Debby Irving (2017) that we are pleased to be able to share here. Moore introduces the White Privilege Conference WPC to a Canadian audience, and candidly discusses his motivations and goals for initiating the conference almost 20 years ago.

In his first publication to explicitly discuss the rationale behind the WPC, Moore shares insights from his own ongoing journey. He emphasizes the importance of starting with the self, and the impossibility of skipping the deep personal work that we each must do. He then moves from the self to systems. Confronting the common misunderstanding that examining White privilege is about making White people feel guilty, the shift to systems work is essential: “This is not about evil bad White people or blame and shame. I am saying evil bad White supremacy. … Systems change people all the time. Time to think about changing the system” (Moore & Irving, 2017, p. 9).

Debby Irving expands upon Moore’s analysis by demonstrating how the dynamics of White privilege and supremacy have played out throughout her own life as a White woman. She moves between both the personal and systemic levels, emphasizing the manner in which White supremacist institutional practices privilege individual White people, all the while making it seem normal.

What I couldn’t see, what I hadn’t been taught, was that there had been hundreds of years of policy in the United States that had restricted who could live where, who could be educated where, who could get money through the lending system and at what rate, who had access to all the food, who had access to transportation, who got Social Security benefits, who got land, who got access to the GI Bill, and so on. And that all of that had been an institutional and structural unrolling that diverted resources disproportionately to White people. And once I understood that … I understood how being White had allowed me to develop a distorted world view. (pp. 11-12)
Hilary Brown and Dolana Mogadime (2017) met over a period of a year to discuss what it means to teach about social justice and diversity in teacher education programs. Their conversations were documented using a recording device and followed research processes that align with duoethnography. The two researchers ask critical questions about their positionality as White and as Black and the impact that had on the curriculum and on the teaching, and learning environment they provide for their teacher education students. The view was to invite their students into these similar critical conversations. Brown and Mogadime argue that if teacher education programs are vested with preparing teacher education students to embrace identities that affirm diversity, then the students will similarly need to undergo genuine critical conversations about race, gender, sexuality, and class. The researchers surmise that their role involves modeling and documenting how these conversations might take place through duoethnography.

The next article “First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Leads: Transforming Education by Sharing Our Praxis,” by Katherine Samuel (an author who felt compelled to use an anonymous name), provides an insider’s analysis of the dangers and opportunities inherent in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s new requirement that each school board hire a dedicated “First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Lead” (Leads are not required to be indigenous themselves). This decision is aligned with many individual schools’ efforts to teach about Canada’s colonial history, and to bring in the voices, stories, and perspectives of indigenous peoples. As one would expect, the author finds varying degrees of commitment and success. Too often, the anonymous author finds educators teaching about “safe” concepts such as medicine wheels, regalia, and artwork, yet teachers become uncomfortable and even resistant to teaching about the violent nature of colonialism, such as land dispossession, racism, or governmental policies that continue to shape the lives of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. These latter topics have been identified as “dangerous” by educators, and teachers have the discretion and ability to omit these topics from their lessons. (p. 45)

The author is in a unique position to try to change this as part of a program to work with specific model schools to move past these and other obstacles. The author’s goal is to establish the purpose and direction for Indigenous education for these model schools. This direction will involve guiding educators to think critically about the work that they are doing. …While teaching about culture is an important part of the work … I want them to consider how they are complicit in settler colonialism, and to alter their classrooms by teaching about Canada’s racist and colonial history. I want to teach them how to educate others about Indigenous sovereignty, treaties, the Indian Act, residential schools, acts of resistance, and more. (p. 47)

Next, Kyle Ashlee’s article “Utilizing Mindfulness and Contemplative Practices to Promote Racial Identity Development for White College Students” examines the potential usefulness of mindfulness practices in the classroom. Ashlee emphasizes specific beneficial effects on white college students’ racial identity development, and the potential to promote sustainable engagement and reduce harm to students of color in education settings dealing with diversity related issues:
Given the lack of experience that many white college students have with racial diversity, many are fearful of making mistakes in diversity education (Bedard, 2000; Kivel, 1996; Sleeter, 1992). This fear holds many white students back from authentically engaging in diversity education in the first place (DiAngelo, 2012). Using mindfulness, white college students can become more resilient and prepared for challenging interactions that may occur in diversity education. (p. 58)

The author provides some concrete examples educators and leaders can adopt in any setting.

The next contribution “What Can You Do When You Don’t “Fit the Mold”? Dismantling White Privilege Affecting Career Advancement in the Education System,” by another anonymous author, recounts one Chinese Canadian man’s experience working in the education system, and the constant micro aggressions and micro insults he suffers. At numerous points, he stops to consider what he is willing to sacrifice to succeed in a system designed to exclude people like him. We are privy to each decision along the way, and his growing commitment to not abandon his sense of self and culture. Each confrontation is placed within the context of the broader research on the topic. Weaving together personal narrative, research, and concrete strategies, the author shares this man’s strategies as well as his success in confronting an institution that is central to reproducing White privilege. Some of these challenges corroborate with Mogadime’s (2008) research, signaling that the issues raised by Anonymous have been enduring for racialized teachers.

Aron shares her very personal journey with readers. Episodes of her life show her transformation from a naive white child educated in the South, to an adult who has gone back to fill in the gaps in her education. Her contribution reflects the critical questions she asked about incidents in her life. For example, she recounts her sense of Southern pride in receiving an award from the Daughters of the American Revolution in a hall that she later learns barred Marian Anderson from performing there because she was Black. Individuals on the path to examining their own White privilege must go back and examine their earliest assumptions about who they are, asking what stories were excluded, and who was excluded in the process of developing a self-affirming identity. On this path, she interrogates memories of friends and family, material culture, and the civil rights movement, juxtaposing the original affective experience with what she now knows. As Aron acknowledges, we are now fortunate to have many publications that explore the continuous personal transformations of White people examining their own White privilege, and while we may find similarities and patterns, each story in uniquely individual.

It is appropriate that we conclude this Special Double Issue with Maggie Kyle’s “Poetry Examining the Edges.” Kyle is a university undergraduate student. We have heard from a range of voices: multigenerational, from both Canada and the U.S., possessing various racial identities, and coming from different institutional contexts. Together, they provide varied insights into issues ranging from the personal to the institutional, as well as the ways these are intertwined. Kyle’s series of poems bridge all of these domains. She begins with “My Body Was not Built for an Institution” (p. 88) She contrasts her own embodiment—“my skin…my face…my sexuality…my bones” (p. 88)—with the organizations and institutions which would try to mold her into an entirely different form, a form that can be disciplined, drugged, colonized, governed, pacified, and folded up into a box. In the end, she will not be restrained or contained. She declares her defiance and resistance. Her other pieces examine the themes of genocide,
capitalism, democracy, and nature, using metaphors and memories as her creative tools. We witness that very little has changed as we hear echoes of the stories shared by Aron. Read in conjunction with each other, listening to a White elder and a Black youth, we gain even greater insights into the repetitive production of White privilege. The reader may be left feeling despair, yet Kyle concludes with a challenge and a call to action we can’t turn away from.

Finally, it is important and striking to note that multiple contributors have chosen not to use their real names as authors for fear of possible retaliation or other negative consequences. For example, the author of “‘What Can You Do When You Don’t “Fit the Mold”? Dismantling White Privilege Affecting Career Advancement in the Education System’” explains that she has decided to conceal her identity because she has been advised by her teacher’s union that “your employer views you as the ‘public’ face of the organization, and it has been accepted in law that school boards are employers that have reputations to protect. If you are commenting in a public manner on an issue that could be viewed to negatively tarnish the reputation of the board there could be disciplinary action laid against you.” (cover page)

This statement alone emphasizes the critical importance of the work in which all of these authors are engaged, as well as the necessity of online, open-access journals like these that are willing to take risks. In the end, it is up to you, our readers, to add your voices and your commitment to this movement for equity, justice, and action.

Disclaimer: The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) 6th edition uses White/Black when referring to racial/ethnic groups. We use either Capital or low case according to author's preference.
References


