

# **Intersectionality, Decolonization, and Educating for Critical Consciousness**

## **Rethinking Praxis and Resistance in Education**

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### **Abstract**

We are living in a time when scholar and student activists are siphoned within a hegemonic and colonizing university structure that maintains and upholds neoliberalism and whiteness as an ideology. The need to reimagine such spaces has never been more dire. We argue that by interconnecting and complicating the philosophical and conceptual tenets of intersectionality and decolonization, therein lies the potential for university students to grapple with such notions as cognitive dissonance, the dialectics of consciousness, as well as understanding the importance of seeing themselves as being with and within the world. All of these elements encompass praxis and educating for critical consciousness. We discuss that by grounding students' thinking within an interconnected epistemological framework and radical philosophy of educating for critical consciousness, they will be better equipped to challenge their own education, as well as leave the university as agents of resistance and transformation.

*Keywords:* intersectionality, decolonization, critical education, educating for critical consciousness, whiteness as an ideology

### **Introduction**

*History well-confirms democracy is never guaranteed, even during great movements of people. As such, we are reminded that democracy is never a given, but rather entails an ongoing emancipatory struggle for political voice, participation, and social action. With this in mind,*

*higher education continues to exist as a formative contested terrain of struggle, given the potential of public education to serve as a democratizing force for the evolution of critical consciousness and democratic public life.* (Darder, 2012, p. 424)

We are living in a time when scholar and student activists are siphoned within a hegemonic and colonizing university structure that prioritizes self-meritocracy and politically neutral education. Instead of centering teaching and learning that prepares students to actively challenge societal inequities and oppressions, the university<sup>1</sup> maintains the status quo of hegemony, neoliberalism, and whiteness as an ideology.<sup>2</sup> According to Bargh (2007, p. 13) “neoliberalism demonstrates a translation of many older colonial beliefs, once expressed explicitly, now expressed implicitly, into language and practices which are far more covert about their civilizing mission.” In essence, a neoliberal ideology seeks to colonize, suppress, and reinforce the fear that any form of critical thinking within the university might disrupt and challenge the status quo of complacency and individualism.

Importantly, the tenets of both neoliberalism and hegemonic whiteness work in tandem to uphold and “normalize” the university as a colonizing structure by undermining “diversity politics” and radical voices from the margins (cultural, racialized, economic, gendered, and sexual borderlands). In as much, the language surrounding diversity itself needs to be traced to the political historical journeys in which the aims for increasing representation were shaped because, as Ahmed and Swan (2006, p. 96) argue, the simultaneous neoliberal push back on and co-option of “diversity politics” require academics to agitate for more than just diverse representation within universities. Furthermore, not only do many universities still inadequately retain and hire Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) students and staff, the neoliberal conditions of spaces within universities can be experienced as fundamentally exclusionary, unsafe, and unwelcoming (McAllister et al., 2019, p. 237).

Notably, there is a connective tissue within universities that is continually being forged between ideologies, intentions, and the formation of policies and practices (Picower & Mayorga, 2015). This must be understood as an amalgamation of the insidious ways of thinking about the world that directly interconnect and dehumanize elements of race, class, gender, among other identifiers. Within such thinking, the university monitors humanity, destroys and delegitimizes community, whilst demeaning the importance of the public good (Giroux, 2001; 2012). As a result, too many students leave the university unprepared to challenge the many facets of white supremacy and other forms of oppression both

within education and society. In fact, so little attention is paid to directly challenging whiteness and racism that many students can spend their entire tenure at university sidestepping such content altogether.

Speaking to this, Brunsma, Brown, and Placier (2012) note,

White students can enter the doors as fresh-persons and exit as seniors virtually unchanged in terms of their assumptions about white supremacy, and that this is both expected and structured into what we do in universities. Thus, education further solidifies the colonization of the white mind when what needs to occur is decolonization. (p. 720)

In other words, whiteness (as a default and/or norm) takes up space and is reinforced as the normalized version of living comfortably with and within the world. By glossing over the insidious ways that white supremacy traverses throughout the university structure, racial awareness is accommodated, whilst evading systems of power that have the potential to alter the larger system of racism and racial ideology (Burke, 2017).

Significantly, transformation from the oppressive and dehumanizing structures of academia are possible and already in action within critical, transgressive work that takes place across many colleges and universities around the world, including (among many others) in Aotearoa, New Zealand<sup>3</sup> (hooks, 1994; McAllister et al., 2019). Throughout this article, we contribute to this body of work and praxis by arguing that by interconnecting and complicating the philosophical and conceptual tenets of intersectionality and decolonization, therein lies the potential for university students to grapple with such notions as cognitive dissonance, the dialectics of consciousness, as well as understanding the importance of seeing themselves as being with and within the world (Freire, 1970; 1974). All of these elements encompass praxis and educating for critical consciousness.

Within this framework, we write this article self-identifying as white, European, Jewish-American, cisgender, able-bodied, middle-class heterosexual woman, and as white, European New Zealander, cisgender, able-bodied, middle-class heterosexual woman. By critically reflecting upon our individual and collective experiences and actions, there is an awareness for how we either reinforce or challenge power.

This article will be broken up into three main sections. The first section discusses intersectionality as both a theoretical framework and an element of praxis. The second part contextualizes decolonization. Specifically, we address the following questions: What is decolonization and what is not? How is this connected to resistance and resilience? The final section pulls together the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and decolonization, arguing that by grounding students' thinking

within an interconnected epistemological framework and philosophy of educating for critical consciousness, they will be better equipped to leave university as proactive agents of resistance and transformation.

### **Understanding Intersectionality**

At its core, intersectionality, coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, served as a base in which to directly critique and challenge the patriarchy within the legal community and society, as well as the whiteness of second wave feminism writ large. It is helpful to think of the following metaphor when unpacking the duelling forces of oppression that underpin the need for an intersectional analysis:

Whose roads are these? Who designed the grid, and then who built them? Whose land is the entire structure on? How does the grid itself marginalize people, transforming some people into so-called “minorities” in the imperial gaze while supposedly being able to serve the interests of the ‘majority’? For me these are the most productive questions that arise as we try to think about the relationship between intersectionality and marginality. (Khatun, p.18, as cited in Silverstein, 2017)

Notably, when thinking about intersectionality in our contemporary moment, the aim is to shift the conversation from thinking about feminism as a white, liberal, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle/upper-class movement, to one that must be rearticulated so as to interrogate the historical and present “norm” of what defines a feminist. Furthermore, it reinforces the notion that discrimination, marginalizations, and oppressions remain because of “the stubborn endurance of the structures of white dominance” (Crenshaw as cited in Coaston, 2019).

Moreover, an intersectional analysis and interpretation should be rooted in recognizing and analyzing social inequalities. In particular, it should “explore the interaction between different identity markers, such as race, and gender, that underpin social, political, and economic formal rules and informal norms and cultures” (Evans, 2016, p. 68). In as much, intersectionality moves away from seeing people as a homogenous, undifferentiated mass, and instead, provides a framework for explaining how social divisions of race, gender, age, and citizenship status (just to name a few) position people differently in the world (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Within this nuanced and context specific analysis, intersectionality has the potential to effectively challenge a single story of oppression, marginalization, and power.

### **Intersectionality as a Theoretical Framework**

Building on this definition and understanding of intersectionality, it makes sense to situate its tenets within a nuanced theoretical framework so as to avoid essentialist narratives about whom or what intersectionality is referring to. Within the context of teaching and learning, an intersectional framework provides a platform to recognize one's standpoint<sup>4</sup> (both as educators and students) so as to challenge the dominant ideologies of traditional educational practices, as well as tease apart hegemonic understandings of identity, oppression, and resistance. As hooks (1986) reminds us, "women must learn to accept responsibility for fighting oppressions that may not directly affect us as individuals. When we show our concern for the collective, we strengthen our solidarity" (p. 137). To experience solidarity, we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs, and goals around which to unite to build Sisterhood.

Further, Lorde (1984) wrote for the need to welcome difference, not to "merely tolerate" people who are different. We must embrace difference because it is that which provides a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity has the opportunity to spark like a dialectic. Khatun as cited in Silverstein (2017) builds on this stating, "rather than buying this story that theorises humans as deviations from a white, male, propertied, heterosexual, Protestant-but secular individual, I want to look at how the colonial production of these categories continues to see the very terms in which we talk about difference" (p. 16).

An intersectional analysis also provides a framework in which to critique the often-times unchallenged nature of traditional western schooling. Understood as multilogicality, Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) see this practice as simply the need for humans to encounter multiple perspectives in all dimensions of their lives. This idea underscores the importance of recognizing and drawing on indigenous knowledges and perspectives, as well as situating oneself with and within the world (Freire, 1974). Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) understand multilogicality as a process that has the potential to shape social analyses, political perspectives, knowledge production, and action (all elements of understanding praxis). Thus, by incorporating multiple viewpoints through an intersectional framework, "multilogical teachers begin to look at lessons from the perspectives of individuals from different race, class, gender, and sexual orientations. They are dedicated to search for new perspectives" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 139). As such, a multifaceted interpretation of intersectionality as a theoretical framework is what allows it move from a theory to a form of praxis and resistance.

### **Intersectionality as Praxis: Challenging an Ideology of Whiteness**

Arguably, engaging with intersectionality as a form of praxis (or tool) requires a commitment to understanding how its theoretical interpretation is constantly under construction, malleable, and context specific. In other words, seeing intersectionality as an element of praxis requires that one pay close attention to historical, intellectual, and political contexts so that engaging with it as a tool is nuanced and deliberate.

Sandoval (2000) builds on this argument through her discussion of differential consciousness, or an alternative way in which to reassess one's current understandings of oppositional praxis and resistance. In essence, Sandoval recognizes the various ways in which race, gender, and class intersect, and why it is imperative for an interconnectivity of all forms of marginalization so that true transformation can take place. Although Sandoval does recognize and honor oppositional methods and forms of resistance, she advocates for a dynamic process of moving forward, aiming towards expanding and incorporating many diverse forms of opposition and modes of resistance.

We also draw on Collins and Bilge's (2016) discussion of "relationality," as it speaks to the necessary commitment of developing coalitions and/or relations across social divisions. Collins and Bilge state, "relational thinking rejects either/or binary thinking, for example, opposing theory to practice, scholarship to activism, or blacks to whites" (p. 27). This view of relationality informs the way we engage with literature on decolonization, and resistance and resilience in this article. It also synthesises well with Freire's (1970) view of student-teachers and teacher-students, where he deliberately seeks to disrupt the hierarchy through people supposedly occupying one role and never the other. Relationality is a central component of the multifaceted ways that scholar and student activists can engage in decolonial, anti-racist, and collective resistance in universities.

To reiterate, one of the central tenets of an intersectional analysis is to challenge and confront the omnipresent racism and white supremacy found both within education and society. Within this realm, we look to a few theorists whose work builds on intersectionality as praxis and resistance, whilst centering critical race theory and critical philosophies of whiteness.

A major characteristic within critical philosophies of whiteness is that there must be a re-articulation and re-conceptualization of whiteness. Through this reframing, resistance comes with a comprehensive understanding for the explicit and implicit ways that unexamined

whiteness reinforces the inherent oppression found within our educational institutions and communities. As is often the case, talking about whiteness tends to focus on the invisibility of the privilege and power in a very surfaced manner. Instead, the aim should be to deeply examine and interrogate whiteness as a pervasive ideology, whilst conceptualizing and problematizing it as more nuanced, structural, and institutional, as opposed to an “individual” problem (Haviland, 2008; McIntyre, 2002; Pollock et. al, 2009).

Additionally, we draw on Matias and Mackey, (2016) who argue for a pedagogization of critical whiteness studies. Building on the self-reflexivity that undergirds critical feminist and critical education theories, a pedagogy of critical whiteness becomes an active framework which “deconstructs the material, physical, emotional, and political power of whiteness. Used in conjunction with other critical theories of race, critical whiteness studies provides a ying to the yang studies of race” (Matias & Mackey, 2016, p. 35). Matias and Mackey further emphasise that a true commitment to racial justice cannot be fully actualized by choosing to ignore how the exertions of whiteness create a violent condition for survival. Thus, by unpacking hegemonic and structural whiteness, therein lies an opportunity to penetrate a wider lens through which to understand how an ideology of whiteness and sustained racial domination permeate educational and societal structures. Perceiving educational and societal structures in this way necessitates a critical engagement with the context of colonization and ongoing colonial realities through neoliberal values (Bargh, 2007). Working to interrupt an ideology of whiteness, in education and more generally, therefore cannot be separated from engaging with decolonization work and movements.

### **Complicating Decolonization**

Decolonial work happening in education around the world is conceptualized in a range of different ways. We enter this part of the discussion by situating how decolonization, resistance, and resilience can be understood in our local neoliberal colonial context. Writing about subversive ontologies for Māori, the indigenous people of Aotearoa, New Zealand, Penehira et al. (2014) consider resistance to be defined by collectively-driven, substantive actions which proactively stop “further colonizing forces such as the neoliberal agenda” (Penehira et al. 2014, p. 103; Bargh, 2007). In their work, they seek to demarcate how the terms ‘resilience’ and ‘resistance’ are distinct, yet can work in tandem to have useful import for conceptualizing Māori ontologies in a colonised society. Noting that Māori world views are obviously not homogenous, Penehira et al. (2014)

posit that in general for indigenous peoples, resistance is understood as visible within the actions of indigenous people who share a desire to be proactive, rather than merely reactive to colonizing legacies (Penehira et al., 2014, pp. 103-104). Resistance (like praxis) is action based, and requires a collective outlook and implication to enable resistant action to affect real change.

For example, alternatives to a colonized status quo are actively incorporated and made tangible in the tireless work done to claim back stolen land and to grow decolonizing movements. It must be noted that decolonization and resistance are not inherently the same thing, and therefore, according to Tuck and Yang (2012), decolonization does not stand in as a metaphor for a broad application of the term resistance. This is vital to note because of the ways in which the term *decolonization* gets routinely misappropriated to serve hegemonic (white, colonial) academic purposes—rather than being used directly in relation to reclaiming stolen lands. As Tuck and Yang (2012) argue, although it is essential, committing oneself to the work of decolonization is not easy because it necessarily requires the relinquishing of colonial power and privilege for non-indigenous peoples, as well as conversations with other white<sup>5</sup> people that are necessarily confrontational because of this.

Further to this point, the multifaceted ways in which indigenous women in particular are affected by colonization (the stealing or confiscating of land) continues to be marginalized in such conversations. Simmonds (2011) and Hutchings (2005), each writing about *mana wāhine* (translating approximately to a Māori feminism) and Māori women, contend that colonization and patriarchy are intertwined in their oppression of Māori women. Heterosexist gender roles shape Aotearoa New Zealand's colonial legacy to a larger degree than what is often acknowledged in local critical public discourse about colonization (James & Saville-Smith, 1994).

The redefining of gender roles, and the ways in which gender predominantly organized New Zealand colonial society, served to dually displace Māori women: from their homeland and from their connection to Papatūānuku (earth mother) (Hutchings, 2005). In *tikanga* Māori understanding of women's *wairua* (spirit, spiritual ontology) in relation to Papatūānuku, maintaining care of land and its ecological diversity is essential for Māori women as *kaitiaki* (guardians of the land) where lives and lineages of *whakapapa* (ancestry, genealogy) and *mokopuna* (grandchildren, or children of a future generation) are protected, affirmed and cherished through giving and nurturing life via sacred knowledge and practice of growing and preparing Māori food and medicine. In as much, we support Tuck and Yang's (2012) critique of the limits of discourse



around decolonizing the mind because indigenous women continue to be even further disadvantaged in this way. The lack of action and focus on land reclamation implicit in over-emphasising conscientization as all-encompassing radical action that education can offer is a gendered issue, as well as a colonial issue.

Drawing on Hutchings (2005) and Simmonds (2011) mana wāhine literature about the gendered and sexualised component of colonization is helpful for illustrating our argument that deepening our understanding of and commitment to the work of decolonization is key in intersectional feminist praxis. The crossover of these two frameworks provides a rich and nuanced set of conceptual tools for informing liberatory teaching praxis. There are ways in which Tuck and Yang's (2012) rigorous work on defining decolonization can be drawn on for invaluable insights which strengthen our understanding of Penehira et al.'s (2014) distinguishing between resistance and resilience, in order to specify how they are simultaneously referring to different things that are connected.

### **Resistance and Resilience**

A resilient ontology is a powerful ontology, even though it has limits to individual, rather than collective, experience. Notably, resilience has the potential to enable those who can operate within the dominant syntax to take the reins and transform dialogue in their own lives, thereby impacting the lives of those around them (Freire, 1974). Resilience can enable the engagement of these individuals in more collective-focused efforts to resist further threats of colonization. The ways in which groups of indigenous peoples engage with the term differs and is context dependent. Accordingly, it must be noted that these concepts are not homogeneously agreed upon by all indigenous peoples, nor all people within one ethnic group. Writing about the usefulness of the term 'resilience' for the Anishinaabe people of Lake Nipigon in Northern Ontario, Canada, McGuire (2010) proposes that resilience is most useful for indigenous peoples when it actively contributes to community strength, a similar view shared by Penehira et al. who describe how it can benefit Māori. McGuire (2010) draws on Durie (2006) to propose that indigenous peoples reclaim the word 'resilience' to work for them: resilience describes a positive lens for self-empowerment and affirmation as an indigenous person, and by extension instilling a determination to "succeed" beyond racist, colonial expectations (McGuire, 2010, p. 121).

Extending on McGuire's (2010) argument that the term does not adequately offer scope for theorizing collective movement and action of indigenous folk, Penehira et al (2014, p. 100) urge scholars' and educa-

tors' use of the word 'resilience' to be meaningful and critical when referring to Māori, because the term still has roots in Eurocentric ideas of survival of the fittest and individualist, capitalist notions of adaptability and stamina (ie: neoliberalism). It is obviously inappropriate to simply insert Māori into such pre-existing frameworks, without interrogating the origins of these and the relationships they have with colonization. This is particularly because definitions and understandings of 'resilience' undoubtedly differ for different indigenous peoples, and to a large degree these conceptualizations of resilience are still not widely known or accepted in colonized societies.

Tuck and Yang (2012) further critique the limits of over-emphasising resilience through the popular discourse in critical education studies around 'decolonizing' the mind, rather than focusing on the fundamentals that decolonizing work must do: join efforts to have all stolen land repatriated. They maintain that Freire's notion of critical consciousness is often all too conveniently taken by academics to stand in for acts of doing, which as Tuck and Yang (2012) point out and Lorde (1984) contends constitutes fundamental conditions for real, lived freedom. Freeing the mind, or conscientization, can only take displaced indigenous people so far when their land remains stolen and the material inequalities related to this land displacement persist.

Conceptualizing decolonization in a critical and specific way also ties into understanding the interrelated yet distinct work taking place locally and internationally, between seeking diversity in academia, as well as moving "beyond" it (Ahmed & Swan, 2006, pp. 97-98). Increasing BIPOC diversity is essential, because the number of Māori and Pasifika students and staff within New Zealand universities are important indicators for how well the institution is progressing in terms of valuing indigenous knowledge and people (McAllister et al., 2019, p. 237). Māori and Pasifika graduate students themselves have and are pushing for diverse faculty and syllabi, and calling on universities to re-think their processes for hiring and supporting BIPOC staff so that the learning space is always already anti-racist and actively geared to critique and resist colonial structures (Funaki & Naepi, 2020; McAllister et al., 2019). McAllister et al. (2019, pp. 243-244) argue that a diverse workplace is not necessarily a decolonized one, and is not in itself a marker of how well the institution has disentangled itself from neoliberal logic which embeds hegemonic whiteness akin to colonialism. If neoliberal frameworks for organizing academic spaces are not themselves unravelled and radically re-thought, then the same fundamental issues will remain.

### **Critical Consciousness and Educational Relationalities**

Arguably, the merging together of intersectionality and educating for critical consciousness is not a linear nor a one-dimensional process. We highlight the importance of thinking deliberately about the content and context specific manner in which these frameworks interconnect. As such, it is helpful to think about the role of Freire's concept of educating for critical consciousness when considering these theories in relation to educational praxis.

Freire (1970) argued for the importance of locating critical consciousness as a set of linguistic tools as they have a foundation within the social and political visions of various revolutionary, intersectional, and critical race thinkers (see for example hooks, 1986; 1994; 2000; Lorde, 1984; Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 1983; Young, 1997; 1990). Importantly, linguistic tools help us to name problems which were previously unnamed, and to develop a moving language for talking about them in the context of the wider institution and society which the classroom is located. Critically, this language must then shape the direction of subsequent action (Lorde, 1984, pp. 36-37). In our teaching, we must seek to create liberatory learning spaces which resist an individualization of education and instead honor an "ontological vocation to become more fully human" (Freire, 1970, p. 47; hooks, 2000).

Additionally, Penehira et al. (2014) note that we must seek to deepen our understandings of resilience as distinct from, yet connected to resistance in order to move away from dichotomising the two terms. We must strengthen how we construct frameworks around the personal and collective so that they may be interpreted more meaningfully for informing the social action that so many students envision and are drawn towards. It is this process that provides a space for students to engage with the dialectics of consciousness.

Au (2012) discusses a dialectical conception of consciousness as "how we are simultaneously with and within the world" (p. 16). It is what intertwines and connects the world and community both inside and outside of our educational communities; "we come to know things vis-à-vis our inseparable relationships with the totality of our environments" (Au, 2012, p. 19). The dialectics of consciousness support the notion that our educational institutions and classroom cultures are simply just a microcosm of society. The interconnectedness between the two spaces is fluid in nature, evolving, and moving together. We are both in the classroom, and in the world, simultaneously.

Additionally, as we think about this dialogue and its relationship to sociological theory, Hays (1994, p. 61) argues that sociologists and

critical scholars should not dichotomise structure and agency in understanding social change, but rather see them as inextricably interlinked. This is imperative not only in being attuned to the complexity of lived experiences of oppression, discrimination and empowerment, but also in framing how we must encourage students to think about the scope of educational and social change. Overemphasising the power of neoliberal individualizing discourses as being equipped to explain every nuance of social agency can mean we risk losing sight of individuals as still connected to and influenced by community—albeit in increasingly fragmented, liquid ways (Hays, 1994; Bauman, 2007).

In the context of this discussion, there are also risks of reifying what it means to be oppressed, as well as the ways in which people experience oppression. This is unhelpful because the inherent stagnation of the neoliberal characterization of deficit individuals can take focus away from liberatory work and everyday practice which is already being undertaken by individuals and the communities of which they are a part. Hays (1994, p. 61) maintains that structures are fundamental for facilitating our understanding of individuals, and structurally focused change provides, in her words, “the tools for creative and transformative action, [which] thereby make[s] human freedom possible.” In this respect, we can move beyond neoliberal characterizations of “the individual” and instead perceive the student person as a non-universal category, yet also situated in and shaped by wider societal norms, institutions, and as holding membership of various groups. It is our hope that teaching radical frameworks and theory as the building blocks for social change can give both educators and students personal and political tools for transformation.

### **Intersectionality as Liberatory Praxis**

These transformative building blocks are where we see intersectionality playing a crucial role. Understanding intersectionality as praxis (Sandoval, 2000) is to understand a theory which is active, alive, and constantly expanding. Grounding one’s thinking and teaching in the works of radical intersectional thinkers such as bell hooks (1994) is integral to transforming students’ preconceived ideas around the purpose and usefulness of learning theory and what counts as “T”ruth. hooks’ writing is geared toward liberation through education and knowledge creation, which fundamentally has the most significant import beyond the classroom. When learning about feminism, for example, one can look to the expertise of Black and indigenous feminist activists and authors working outside of academia for guidance on where and how

transformation can take place (Davis, 1983; Young, 1998; Lorde, 1984; Simmonds, 2011; Smith, 2012). This is not only necessary for the obvious acknowledgement of one's standpoint and positionalities, but also for students to see and better understand in a more tangible way hooks' (2000) views that critical feminism should reach and impact our communities outside of academic spaces:

Literature that helps inform masses of people, that helps individuals understand feminist thinking and feminist politics, needs to be written in a range of styles and formats. We need work that is essentially geared towards youth culture. No one produces this work in academic settings. Without abandoning women's studies programs which are already at risk in universities...we need feminist studies that are community-based. Imagine a mass-based feminist movement where folks go door to door passing out literature, taking the time...to explain to people what feminism is all about. (hooks, 2000, p. 23)

Student engagement with this work is vital for transformative envisioning of this theory to reckon with the embedded hegemonies in the everyday spaces which each student navigates in differing, yet somewhat similar ways.

Intersectional theory is necessarily equipped to be liberatory beyond the confines of the classroom, because it pushes back on the homogenizing and hierarchical ways that students can be taught to conceptualize epistemologies in the neoliberal university for the sake of valuing individual self-improvement, efficiency, job market viability and quantifiability (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Labaree, 1997). Further, the most meaningful theory is rooted in making sense of experience in its' uniqueness of character yet likeness in the face of collective marginalization (hooks, 1994, p. 70; Davis, 2007). Theory as drawing from lived experience in this way is socially, politically, and materially useful for shaping transformative action, as well as for being able to recognize radical practise that's already happening.

Additionally, Freire (1970; 1974) notes that educating for critical consciousness enables a process of the learner becoming more fully human to expand the role they perceive education playing in their lives. If we want to conceive of education as liberatory and meaningful beyond the confines of academic boundaries, then embracing cognitive dissonance is essential. Cognitive dissonance within this discussion refers to the learning of something that goes against what has always been deemed or thought of as "T"ruth (Storch & Storch, 2003). For example, learning about the insidious nature of whiteness as an ideology produces a cognitive state of internal conflict, thus a dissonance in one's understanding of the world.

Freire further argues for the importance of developing a liberatory praxis, which connecting to embracing cognitive dissonance, involves a continuous process of unlearning and relearning for educators and students. It is helpful to think about this in terms of Freire's notion of teacher-students and student-teachers, whereby through dialogue, the traditional distinction between who teaches and who is taught is blurred (Freire, 1970, p. 53). It is possible to imagine a teacher-student relationship where both simultaneously teach and are taught, consolidating Freire's (1970, pp. 53-54) premise that nobody is self-taught, and that people teach each other. Breaking down traditional conceptions of authority in this way, this unlearning and relearning is pertinent to realizing the term 'liberatory' in action. 'Liberatory' could also be understood as emancipatory teaching in this respect, underpinned by a continuously deepening commitment to anti-oppression in its many facets and conceptualizations.

Finally, liberatory praxis is collaborative. This is visible not merely as an end goal, but as a process which requires the engagement and commitment of all students and teachers, taking into account Freire's (1970, pp. 53-54) concept of the ever-shifting capacity and simultaneity of these roles within each person. It necessarily involves re-imagining learning spaces as having radical orientation. Liberatory learning can be conceptualized as taking place within spaces which, through dialogue, can in some way resist the constraints of hegemonic institutional boundaries and therefore have the potential for educating for critical consciousness (Penehira et al., 2014; Freire, 1974). The co-construction of these re-imagined learning spaces with students involves a liberatory praxis because there must be a necessary recognition of the ways in which the neoliberal university both legitimizes and hides its oppression of marginalised groups by generating colonial knowledge around incompetent or destitute individuals as default and normal (Bargh, 2007; Collins, 2000; de Saxe, 2019, p. 23). To critically interrogate the source of these supposedly foundational, taken for granted forms of knowledge, and to question the very definitions of common sense that they produce, is by extension, necessarily disruptive of the status quo.

### **Conclusion**

It is this active engagement (often discomforted) with the aforementioned critical content, that we argue has the potential to reframe the ways in which we move about with and within the world. We draw on the work of Apple and Buras (2006) who state, "Consciousness of relations of subordination and domination is the first step in moving toward

the critical sensibility needed to build counterhegemonic movements in education and elsewhere” (p. 282). There is an intimate interconnectivity between education, dialectics, and the cognitive dissonance that often occurs when engaging with content that asks one to challenge a ‘common sense’ understanding of the world in which we live. It is precisely through a domain of praxis that we are asked to interweave the theoretical and critical content with the resistance work that aims to rupture an ideology of whiteness, white supremacy, and colonization.

The process of sparking this dialogue, even with the difficulties when teaching a wide range of students, is integral to a collaborative co-construction of a radical learning space. This praxis not only enables the formation of a learning community with lasting impact that helps to nurture and stimulate student-teachers (hooks, 1994; Freire, 1970) through their wider university experience and after graduating, but also provide integral foundations for doing activist work which challenges oppressive systems in various forms. The ways in which these challenges take hold are numerous, but what we focus on—in partially addressing dichotomies that often can frame theoretical conversations in the university classroom—is how we conceptualize spaces as having both resilient and resistant potential (Penehira et al., 2014).

Finally, we must proactively engage with this work with an open mind and heart if we are to aim towards authentic transformation. Importantly, this is not a prescription for any specific pedagogy for liberation. Instead, drawing on the nuanced tenets of intersectionality, decolonization, and educating for critical consciousness, we are asked to be open to changing and challenging our minds, bodies, and senses of being. With this inherently political project of reimagining and complicating praxis and resistance, we must take ownership of our political voices, engage in actions and discourses of solidarity, and strive for social change.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> We use the term ‘university’ broadly to describe higher education settings. Our intention is not to homogenize universities, but to critique universities that fail to interrupt and interrogate whiteness and white supremacy. As such, we recognize and build on HBCUs and TWIs that challenge whiteness, neoliberalism, and white supremacy within their universities.

<sup>2</sup> We follow Burke’s (2017) definition of ideology as being always grounded in material realities, embedded in institutions and concrete social practices that give them meaning and produce real social outcomes... ideologies are racist to the degree that they maintain a “racialized social system.”

<sup>3</sup> Aotearoa is the Māori name for New Zealand, which we prefer to use both in this work and in general parlance. This is consistent with our focus on decoloniality as a part of intersectional feminism in education here.

<sup>4</sup> Racial standpoint often exists in opposition to dominant cultural systems such as whiteness as an ideology, white supremacy, and hegemonic epistemologies (Kinefuchi & Orbe, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> We use the term “white” to denote a racial identity, while “whiteness” refers to an ideology that stratifies humans and embodies racial power (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

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