

“IT’S ALL PART OF THE JOB”

Everyday silencing in the life of a secondary school teacher

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Abstract

This article examines the issue of racial silencing in mainstream education by analysing four autoethnographic vignettes based on the authors’ teaching experiences. The methodology draws attention to the underlying racial assumptions that underpin the everyday of teachers’ working lives, thus demonstrating how silencing serves to perpetuate the interests of Pākehā culture. We argue that mainstream pedagogical approaches to culture and ethnicity also contribute to the phenomenon of silencing, and assert that racialised students will continue to be disenfranchised in mainstream schools unless researchers, teachers and administrators are prepared to “see” how issues of race inform the day-to-day experiences of a teacher’s working life.

Keywords

race, silencing, autoethnography, mainstream education,
colour-blindness, critical race theory

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Introduction

A lack of attention by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the teaching profession to the ways that racial bias is manifest in the macro- and microstructures of mainstream education is undoubtedly contributing to the challenges faced by ethnically marginalised students in Aotearoa New Zealand today (Kidman, Yen, & Abrams, 2013; Smith, Tesar, & Myers, 2016). We argue that few educational professionals with a genuine interest in positive outcomes for Māori and Pasifika students would dispute such an issue, but this is uncharted territory and raises many questions about the multifarious ways that racial bias, or “white supremacy” as it is known in the field of critical race theory, is enacted in education.

Critical race theory is a framework that may be used to examine racial bias in institutional structures. Central to this theory is the concept of colour-blindness, which is described as a white resistance to seeing issues of race (Frideres, 2015). The ability to remain colour-blind is integral to racial oppression because harmful historical grievances are swept away by the belief that equal opportunities exist for everyone in society, thus making transparent white supremacy. Leonardo (2005) argues that colour-blindness has replaced more overt forms of racism and people of colour can only be liberated through drawing attention to colour-blind policies. Such covert racism is inherent in educational policies, institutional practices and the cultural and racial dispositions of a predominantly white teaching community. This concern reveals how some forms of racism are more insidious than others (Nieto, 2003).

Colour-blindness exists in the form of racial silencing. Racial silencing is defined as “the denial of the meanings and effects of race. Silencing can therefore be understood as ignoring the problems of race” (Harries, 2014, p. 1108). The purpose of this article is to highlight some ways that racial silencing encroaches on the day-to-day functions of a secondary school teacher

in order to reveal the racial assumptions that underpin the “everyday” of teachers’ working lives. We argue that the silencing in mainstream secondary schools and educational discourse only serves to perpetuate neocolonial educational interests. Such a phenomenon will be highlighted through four fictionalised vignettes that are based on the educational experiences of the authors. Following the lead of Stewart, Tamatea and Mika (2015), we draw on a form of autoethnographic methodology and use our own experiences and perceptions as secondary school English teachers to expose how racial silencing is applied in mainstream contexts.

How does the educational landscape within Aotearoa arrive at a place where we are ignoring the problems of race? Issues of culture and ethnicity saturate our educational discourse, with intense scrutiny placed on the achievement disparity between Pākehā and racialised students who never quite meet mainstream measures of success. This issue has been a government “priority” in education for many years (MOE, 2009), but the “gap” in measured achievement is slow to close. Given these disparities, we begin this article by asking who really benefits from such busy activity to remedy the underachievement of particular ethnic groups?

We suggest part of the problem is due to a society driven by the interests of the groups who hold power and how they choose to view the issue. In Aotearoa, the dominant racial group is white or Pākehā (these terms will be used interchangeably in the article), followed by Māori, then Pasifika (MOE, 2013). The terms “ethnicity” and “cultural identity” refer to concepts that are historically, culturally and politically constructed; they are variable and changing and involve the “participation of groups themselves in the construction, reproduction and transformation of their own identities” (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998, p. 37). However, “race” is strongly linked to power, where biological meaning is assigned by the dominant culture to reflect inferiority and superiority. With these definitions in mind, the achievement disparity

“problem” becomes a matter of perspective (which in itself is a manifestation of silencing) that requires deep ontological examination.

Yet most teachers lack the time and a perceived framework to think critically about the way power and race shapes their profession. Our combined 40 years working as teaching professionals in mainstream secondary schools have shown us that there is a huge amount of goodwill among teachers in Aotearoa. We have seen teachers work hard, searching for ways in which they can improve their pedagogical practice and meet the needs of classrooms of diverse learners. But a working day consists of more immediate concerns: classroom interaction, lesson preparation, marking, meetings and administrative duties. Teachers are unlikely to consider the meanings and effects of race within their classrooms without explicit reference to it in policy documents or acknowledgement by the wider teaching community of the existence of racial bias within schools.

The four vignettes presented below centre on a female mainstream secondary school teacher of Pākehā ethnicity as she attempts to understand a classroom tension. While one application of critical race theory draws on narratives of discrimination, the subjective nature of human experience can also act as a way of challenging what is expected and therefore accepted (Lynn, 2005). Utilising a critical race theoretical framework challenges a “typical” reading of the teacher’s perceptions and interactions with others and demonstrates how racial silencing is enacted in aspects of mainstream schooling. We suggest that deficiencies in educational policy and practice regarding the meanings and effects of race contribute to the continued alienation of ethnically marginalised students in mainstream schools.

Research context and methodology

We are long-serving English teachers who have worked in a number of secondary schools and

held various management positions. One of us is a female of Māori ethnicity, the other a male of British heritage. While we may have divergent backgrounds, we both chose to be teachers to advocate for equitable educational outcomes for marginalised learners. Further into our teaching careers we decided to undertake doctoral study, motivated by the need to understand the tensions we had experienced working with Pasifika and Māori students and their communities in mainstream secondary schools. We recognise now more than ever that schools can be covertly and at times openly hostile to racialised learners. The four vignettes are fictionalised accounts based on our own teaching experiences. They centre on a cultural tension that is familiar to us, and one which we believe is familiar to many teachers in mainstream education.

The methodology surrounding the development and use of these vignettes retains some of the strengths of more traditional autoethnography whilst pushing the boundaries of the genre. Ethnography requires the researcher “to get into place” to make yourself (and your culture) “vulnerable” (Goffman, 1989, as cited in Meo-Sewabu, 2014, p. 353) in order to draw attention to hidden ways in which cultural matters persist in everyday life. As a branch of ethnography, autoethnography is a self-focused exploration of the intersection between cultural location and personal perception. Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008) explain that it includes “cultural elements of personal experience” in which the researcher may “situate themselves, contesting and resisting what they see” (p. 22). Therefore, the silenced aspects of one’s own experience can become voiced through the autoethnographic process.

Fictionalised experience is perceived to be a legitimate autoethnographic approach. Fictional accounts of real events and real people have been crafted to deal with specific issues in sociology, psychology and anthropology. Such studies note that ethical benefits are associated with the masking of people and events, especially those which have been encountered in

everyday situations (Inckle, 2010). Elsewhere, stories are recognised as providing a powerful narrative through which deeper societal analysis can take place (Stewart et al., 2015). Angrosino (1998) references Shakespeare when he argues that a “story doesn’t have to be factual in order to be true” (p. 34), an idea that resonates with English teachers such as ourselves.

A further benefit of fictionalised autoethnographic data is its ability to scrutinise culture as a system of logic with its own underpinning assumptions and internal coherence (Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009, p. 116). Thus, cultural “truth” is not momentary but can echo through a series of events captured through ethnographic fiction. Indeed, we have found that interacting as contributing authors has exposed similar experiences of everyday silencing despite gender and ethnic differences.

Our particular approach to autoethnographic methodology shapes personal narrative to achieve “verisimilitude” (Stewart et al., 2015); in doing so we “identify and critique the power relations rooted in the sociohistorical contexts of discourse that are occurring in the act of performing personal stories” (Spry, 2001, p. 718). In pursuit of this, critical literacy questions which recognise that power relationships underpin the production and consumption of texts can be applied to an autoethnographic experience. In answering, researchers must exercise self-reflexivity that takes into account how their “text” is shaped by ideological and epistemological assumptions, as well as their own subjective and normative claims (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008).

The four fictional vignettes represent a cultural tension based on our teaching experiences. For the ethical and crafting reasons discussed above, the essence of each narrative is based on real situations and we do not refer directly to potentially known individuals or school contexts. The process of developing the vignettes involved the sharing of ideas and possible approaches to developing an article based on an authentic teaching experience.

As a result of this activity, one of the writers developed the “story” behind the vignettes while the other wrote the narrative descriptions. Once complete, the vignettes were then shared and reworked, discussed and recrafted. The data (vignettes) were then coded and analysed to identify key themes (Saldana, 2013). Subsequent analysis demonstrates how a number of seemingly small and insignificant moments in the everyday of a teacher’s life actually reflect inadequate understandings and approaches to the ways educational institutions deal with issues of race and culture.

Vignettes

1. *The Classroom*

It’s 9:50, time for second spell. Chris is picking up the papers from spell one. Chris thinks, “That was good, must use that again.” The class starts coming in. Chris looks up. It’s always the same back row. She used to wonder why. Halfway through the class, it’s question time. Chris throws out a few questions, trying to judge the understanding of the class. Have they got it? The back row of Māori and Pasifika students won’t answer, though she thinks they probably know. How is a teacher to build the next steps for the class without knowing? Chris thinks about a journey to the back of the class, but a kid at the front wants to clarify an instruction, and Chris is keen to help. The moment is lost. Chris regrets it, but there it is. Chris didn’t sit them at the back, and didn’t stop them from joining in. It’s all part of the job.

The classroom situation presented in this vignette is typical for a secondary school English teacher, on an “average” day, facing a confronting issue. Chris is part of everyday school life; the bell rings and students file in. Classroom interaction between the students and the teacher occurs in a seemingly expected way;

questions are asked and the students' responses reflect their understanding of the task. Why do the racialised students seemingly choose to disengage from the rest of the classroom? Chris could be considered empathetic and caring; after all, she's demonstrating a genuine emotional response to the students' isolation and resistance. Therefore, it has to be the students' fault—she's just doing a job . . . right?

2. *Professional Development (PD)*

PD time again. It's a guy from Auckland come to talk about minority groups. He tells his own story—gangs, a teacher that saves him . . . Chris is interested. It's hard to see the relevance though. Our students aren't like that. She mentally considers the details to see if any of this will fit in her classroom, trying to be positive, trying to learn. Does this story echo the lives of any of her students? How would you know anyway? It's not Auckland here for sure. Am I a life-saving teacher, she wonders? Am I that strong? Issues like this man is describing are a Dean's business here. Someone asks a question. One of those guys who don't like any PD. The answer is "Relationships—work on relationships." It's the last comment of the PD and sticks with Chris, though it could mean anything, she thinks.

Listening to visiting PD experts who run workshops about cultural responsiveness is an all too common experience for teachers. "Experts" present "solutions" that frequently fail to attend to the set of complexities faced by the teachers to whom they present. Rarely do teachers get the time or support to authentically apply the workshop strategies to their own context. If culturally responsive pedagogy is going to be viewed as the dominant teaching approach to address issues of ethnicity and culture in secondary school classrooms in Aotearoa, mainstream education should acknowledge the way it is "often understood in limited and simplistic ways" (Sleeter, 2012, p. 568).

In this vignette, Chris does ask constructive questions of the suitability of the workshop in relation to her teaching environment, and also considers her ability to meet the learning rights of ethnically diverse student populations. She is a reflective teacher who is thinking critically about aspects of her job. However, responses such as that from the teacher who has found "the answer" in relationships are not uncommon. We wonder about the conceptual thinking applied by teachers who feel this is the pedagogical elixir to all that ails Māori and Pasifika students in education.

Slogans like "relationships" have developed a strong foothold in Aotearoa due to research and initiatives like that of Te Kotahitanga (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009). Research based on such initiatives argues that secondary school teachers who incorporate Māori culture into the teaching and learning of the classroom make a positive difference to Māori students' motivation and achievement (Bishop et al., 2009; Macfarlane, 2004; Meyer et al., 2010). Why, then, has it been so difficult to emulate such positive results across mainstream education contexts in Aotearoa?

The answer might be found by looking closely at how culturally responsive theory aligns with pedagogical practice in Aotearoa. Culturally responsive pedagogy was first conceptualised as three dimensions: holding high academic expectations and offering appropriate support such as scaffolding; acting on cultural competence by reshaping curriculum, building on students' funds of knowledge, and establishing relationships with students and their homes; and cultivating students' critical consciousness regarding power relations (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Our experiences of working in mainstream classrooms indicate that very little attention is paid to "cultivating students' critical consciousness regarding power relations". It is, perhaps, understandable why this dimension of culturally responsive pedagogy remains untouched; to go down this route is dangerous territory

for the status quo. What are the implications of thinking about how school systems and teacher beliefs contribute to the sociopolitical realities of marginalised peoples? How might the salience of race and power challenge and transform the educational environment?

An absence of critical consciousness regarding power relations contributes to claims that conceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy are “oversimplified” and “distorted” (Sleeter, 2012). A review of literature about culturally responsive schooling (CRS) for Indigenous youth found that research has “little impact on what teachers do because it is too easily reduced to essentialisations, meaningless generalisations or trivial anecdotes” (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 941). The writers assert that CRS should increase focus on sovereignty, racism in schools and Indigenous knowledge. The Te Kotahitanga model has been criticised for over-emphasising the impact of agentic positioning (teachers’ belief they have the power to make a difference to Māori student achievement) and found to ignore other aspects that impinge on student achievement, such as “the historical links between culture, ethnicity, class and the education system” (Gutschlag, 2007, p. 9). Such criticisms of culturally responsive pedagogy support the notion that Pākehātanga still dominates schooling structures (Penetito, 2010).

3. *The Corridor*

It’s a few weeks later and Chris has dropped a few things in the corridor trying to open a door. One of her “target” students picks it up and helps. Chris has been thinking about relationships. Here’s a chance. Chris asks about the game, the family. She’s genuinely interested in the new baby. The replies are the most connected words she’s ever had from the student. There’s a smile and Chris thinks she’s broken through. There must be something in this relationship stuff. Class starts and Chris gets into it. It’s question time again, and Chris hopes that the baby or rugby or some other

connection will make the difference. Hands up . . . but the back row is still quiet and it’s as if nothing has changed. Chris wonders if she needs to be more persistent or should just accept the way things are.

This vignette is familiar to teachers in majority white classrooms. The teacher is working hard at being culturally responsive by developing a good relationship with her students, but the positive interaction falls short of the desired outcome and we see Chris’s resignation at the situation start to creep in. How might this student silence be interpreted if Chris considered the effects of race in her class? Would she respond differently to the students if she “saw” race as an issue? We assert that the failure of teachers to address classroom silences is a form of racial silencing that has significant consequences for racialised students in mainstream educational contexts.

A review of some research on secondary and tertiary classroom silences in relation to “white dominant discursive spaces” (Harries, 2014) is illuminating. The literature that follows captures the voices of racialised students and theorises the issue of marginalised students’ silence in response to classroom interactions. Although the research presented here could provide Chris with a sense of resolution, the analyses of student silences are diverse and demonstrate the complexity of this concept.

Marginalised students may be silenced because of pressures associated with being positioned within a white norm. One university lecturer observed that minority students who are silent in a whole class environment become more vocal when working in smaller groups where minority students make the majority. This was attributed to the establishment of a new norm that reflects minority students’ experiences (Frideres, 2015). Another study found that challenges to white discourses are difficult to make because they are typically being negotiated in white hegemonic spaces (Harries, 2014). In such situations, the support

of non-white peoples are needed to unsettle the white dynamic (Ali, 2003).

The tactical decision of choosing what to say in particular physical contexts of situations can be viewed as a form of silence. Vass (2013) used discursive positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) to explain a contradictory discursive exchange involving an Indigenous male student in a classroom of mostly white peers. During one classroom exchange, the researcher observed an Indigenous student make a joke that stereotyped Indigenous peoples as welfare-dependent, but in a different discussion the student challenged a white student's comment for being racist. Although this appears contradictory, the researcher explains the Indigenous student was "engaged in discursive practices that enabled them to move towards a position that retained or asserted a sense of power" (Vass, 2013, p. 23). Similarly, Rodriguez (2011) identifies that students in her study were sharing experiences of racism with her but not in the classroom. One of her coloured female students referred to the literature studied on the course when referencing examples of racism during a class discussion. Rodriguez feels that the student's reluctance to disclose personal information was a display of self-preservation and also showed that the student believed that readings from the course carried more weight than her own experiences.

Mexican undergraduate students' silence in response to a defamatory presentation by two white students about "illegal" immigration in the United States has been theorised in a number of ways (Briones, 2015). Silence could be attributed to painful lesson content or the historic oppression suffered by Mexicans at the hands of whites. The students' silence was also theorised within a framework of racial microaggressions by Sue et al. (2007):

Deciding to do nothing by sitting on one's anger is one response that occurs frequently in people of color. This response occurs because persons of color may be (a) unable

to determine whether a microaggression has occurred, (b) at a loss for how to respond, (c) fearful of the consequences, (d) rationalizing that "it won't do any good anyway," or (e) engaging in self-deception through denial ("it didn't happen"). (p. 279)

Literature that moves beyond theorising student silence to incorporating student accounts demonstrates that silence is a form of self-preservation. A study of eight Latina community college students found the participants were either forced or chose to be silent in the face of racism and stereotyping (Martinez-Vogt, 2015). Some students had experienced racism because of their accents and were silent in self-defence. Similarly, silence exhibited by the Native American students in a class discussion about Native American literature was perceived to be an attempt to resist assimilation. The students were silent in response to microaggressions enacted by their peers or teachers or both. This finding challenges the belief that Native American student silence was the result of a biological cultural trait (San Pedro, 2015).

Marginalised students may enact silence in classroom discussions about race in white-dominated classrooms because they believe that it is pointless speaking to white students who would not understand their experiences of racism and discrimination (Briones, 2015; Rodriguez, 2011). Rodriguez (2011) asked one coloured male student if he was enjoying class. He responded: "I've just decided to sit back, that's why I don't say nothin' . . . They [white students] don't even know how to talk about race! They'll never understand what it's like, so what's the use?" (p. 124).

Perceptions of acceptable social identities can also influence a student's decision to be silent. A research study in Aotearoa that investigated the multiple identities of four academically high-achieving Māori girls revealed how a usually forthright participant did not feel qualified to voice a Māori perspective because of her fair appearance:

In Geography we had this huge discussion . . . I had opinions about it because I feel that the Māori have every right to be here and they shouldn't have to give up everything, so I felt like I had quite strong opinions but I didn't really feel like I could say them because everyone else would have been like, "well what are you thinking saying that kind of thing?" So I didn't really want to say anything because they would've thought that I was kind of like double-standard, like they probably would've thought that I was not Māori but I was sticking up for them and why was I saying that, you should be on our side. So I didn't want to say anything. (as quoted in MacDonald, 2011, p. 54)

Student silence can also be interpreted as a call for privacy and passive resistance of analysis as the "Other" for white benefit (Briones, 2015; Rodriguez, 2011). Rodriguez (2011) recalls that an African female student would sit in silence when asked by American students what it was like "over there". The student later told Rodriguez: "Why do they keep asking me that? Just go . . . find out what it's like!" (p. 125).

In another study, four students (two white females, one Latina and one Latino) from an educational leadership programme were questioned about their silences in a class discussion about a film that examines race through the eyes of men from various racial and ethnic backgrounds (Mazzei, 2007). The interview responses were then theorised against five categories of silence: (a) *polite or comfortable silences*: thoughts not spoken in fear of offence, (b) *privileged silences*: silences grounded in a white privilege that often prevent an awareness of white as a racial category, (c) *veiled silences*: silences concealing racist thoughts or actions, (d) *intentional silences*: when one chooses not to speak, and (e) *unintelligible silences*: purposeful silences, but not really intentional or noticeable (Mazzei, 2007).

One white participant said she chose not to speak because she was "being respectful" and

the authors believed this demonstrated both *intentional* and *privileged* silences. The *privileged* silence from the other white participant arose from an acknowledgement of white privilege and perceived feelings of guilt towards the experiences of the men in the film. The Latino/a participants enacted *veiled* silence because they created distance between the racialised dimensions of their experiences and those of the men in the film (Diem & Carpenter, 2013).

This review of the literature on racialised student silence in majority white classrooms reinforces that there is a depth of meaning beneath student muteness. Although the impact of racialised class dynamics remains undetected by Chris, the silence from the back row is a constant reminder that there are students in our education system whose learning rights are not being met.

4. Management

More weeks have passed, but that final comment from the PD and what felt like a rebuttal in the classroom have been bothering Chris. It might be worth talking to someone about this, maybe someone who helps with appraisal and PD. Chris can see her Deputy Principal (DP) heading out to the courtyard for duty and moves to intercept him. There's quick conversation on the move, typical of the way teachers have to talk to each other. Chris wants to be positive and starts with a statement of interest in terms of the Auckland presentation about minority groups and the questions this has raised for Chris about how the school supports Māori and Pasifika students. Is there a chance we could talk about this again? The DP's forehead furrows as the question is considered. The answer isn't a no, but it's not a yes either. In fact it's a recall of the DP's opinion of staff reaction to the last presentation—they got "riled up"—and an admission that previous attempts such as Cultureflow have had a poor uptake. Chris notices that these comments reference the

past but don't address the future. Then the DP switches tack—there's always kapa haka practices at lunchtime and Poly Club after school if staff have a burning desire for relationships. And then what about the meeting about the kapa haka festival? Everyone was invited and no one came. The DP seems to think all avenues have been exhausted, and the conversation is exhausting Chris. As they reach the tuckshop there's time for one more try. Would it be possible to discuss why Māori and Pasifika achievement is lower than other students'? Chris can see that persistence is irritating the DP, or could it just be fatigue? The obvious explanation is that the DP has been in charge of flying the banner for marginalised students at the school for a number of years. Maybe he feels personally invested in the issue, and uncomfortable at the questions. To Chris, however, something still isn't right with what has been discussed. Good relationships automatically equal academic achievement? I wish it was that simple, thinks Chris, as she watches the manager head off to his destination.

In this final vignette the focus shifts from the classroom to racial silencing enacted through institutional structures and management. Like the staff member in the second vignette, the DP emphasises the power of relationships to meet the learning rights of marginalised students. His conceptualisation of relationships includes kapa haka practices, te reo Māori workshops (Cultureflow) and Poly Club. When the teaching staff are not receptive to the initiatives or activities endorsed by management to support ethnically marginalised students the DP interprets their attitudes as resistance and disinterest.

We argue here that establishing good relationships with students, while important, does not in itself raise academic achievement with marginalised students if it is not accompanied by an understanding and willingness to engage with structural silencing. Structural silencing is a form of racism that occurs when the neutrality

of a white perspective is not questioned or challenged. At this level colour-blindness "is so powerful it may indirectly carry more educational significance than the official curriculum" (Frideres, 2015, p. 51). There are several examples of structural silencing to consider from this vignette.

The attitudes, values and decisions determined by management around PD, policy implementation and assessment procedures shape the culture of a school and have the power to initiate culture change among the teaching staff. In this vignette, the DP (management) perceives that his particular conceptualisation of relationships will support marginalised students in his educational context. But has he considered that his understanding might preclude other possibilities of authentically addressing culture and ethnicity? We suggest that the DP is unable to see that purposeful engagement with the learning rights of marginalised students requires a critical exploration of the meanings and effects of race. A recent UK study showed that young adults were influenced by colour-blind metanarratives which led them to view society a particular way (Harries, 2014). The political discourse of "we are all the same" was the reason that participants denied the existence of racial structures of power and found it difficult to name racism. Equally, the DP is limited by his perceptions of how to support racialised students, which has significant consequences for the teaching staff and their considerations of culture, race and ethnicity.

Professional development workshops that address issues of culture and ethnicity draw criticism for not providing staff with authentic or meaningful learning experiences (Sleeter, 2008). A cynical view is that workshops allow management to "tick the box" and claim that their responsibilities towards meeting the learning rights of students have been met. Such an approach to cultural responsiveness also aligns with neoliberal reforms which emphasise personal responsibility (Duhn, 2008). Not only is the choice by management to offer workshops

on cultural responsiveness economical, it places the responsibility of meeting the learning rights of marginalised students squarely on teachers. This creates a philosophical rationale for the implementation of workshops that is more deep-seated than a perfunctory one. It is difficult to see how workshops could facilitate the deep reflection and implementation needed for teachers to reflect on the racial bias that may exist within themselves and among societal and institutional structures.

Structural silencing that occurs at policy level further reduces the likelihood of teachers considering how issues of race might be addressed through their teaching practices. *Ka Hikitia: Managing for Success* (MOE, 2009) aims to transform teaching and learning for Māori children and young people. This document encourages teachers to reflect on their attitudes and biases towards Māori learners; however, there is no specific reference that invites teachers to account for the effects of race. By silencing the issue of race, the document ignores the impact of past events that have contributed to the achievement disparity between Pākehā and ethnically marginalised students. The terminology of the document may be open to a racial interpretation, but a society that operates under largely colour-blind conditions would have little awareness of how preconceived cultural and racial biases perpetuate white supremacy. Given this, the likelihood of a critical engagement with the effects of race in mainstream education in Aotearoa seems remote.

A recent study has shown that white teachers are willing to engage in PD that delves into issues of race provided school structures support such a venture (Skerrett, 2011). Seventeen white English teachers articulated that they wanted to learn how to teach about race and engage in PD to improve racial literacy instruction. However, these teacher participants “disclosed a need for structural support from their schools—an official curriculum that included anti-racist texts and a school environment that systematically addressed race, racism

and intercultural interactions among staff and students” (Skerrett, 2011, p. 327). The teachers in this study demonstrated an understanding of the complexities involved in dealing with issues of race, and a desire to engage with racism in a meaningful way.

Discussion

Although only fleeting moments in the life of a teacher, the four vignettes above capture issues and tensions that are complex and perhaps too rich to discuss in one or even two articles. We have tried to demonstrate how different degrees of silencing surface through the everyday moments captured by these narratives, and how each moment contributes significantly to the ongoing exclusion of some students in the mainstream schooling environment.

This article argues that a critical understanding of the ways that race and racism shape educational experiences would open the door to addressing the real challenges faced by culturally marginalised students. As it stands, culturally responsive pedagogy is unlikely to do this because the theoretical aspect of critical engagement, which has the potential to lend itself to discussions about race, is silenced during implementation. Rodriguez (2011) sums up the drawbacks of this approach:

Educators often address issues of difference through a variety of pedagogical learning approaches to accommodate difference (culturally specific and gender related). It is not that the cultural differences approach is inadequate as people are diverse and culturally specific strategies must be taken into account, but more that the emphasis on cultural diversity too often masks power relations, keeping dominant cultural norms in place. Pluralistic models of inclusion assume that stereotypes have long been banished . . . the cultural difference approach reinforces the idea that the colonized possess particular

characteristics that are knowable and managed. (p. 115)

Mainstream education must place less emphasis on knowing and managing particular characteristics in the name of being culturally responsive and directly acknowledge the meanings and effects of race to be better positioned to read the world before reading the word (Freire, 1970). In these neoliberal times, educators must ask themselves how administration, standardisation, compliancy measures and reductionist pedagogical approaches are framing our understanding of how best to meet the learning rights of racialised students and how this may not be working in their best interests. This involves thinking critically about what is perceived as everyday in everyday teaching and learning and about what is expected and accepted within school operations.

However, even “critical thinking” can be constructed in ways which silence power. Often this term is used to describe a process that guides students towards “higher-order” thinking. Critical thought is constructed as a set of skills, rather than an active process that encourages students to think critically about power in society. It is argued that a skills-focused understanding of critical thinking has meant its silencing in other forms (Pullman, 2013). Whose interests are being served by the way we frame critical thought? Where is the place for critical discussions about race and power in society in such a framework?

Prevalent in the literature we have cited on critical race theory and silencing are the authors’ calls to action. Raising consciousness about colour-blindness and the absence of racialised perspectives is not enough; we need to act on this knowledge, but the process of speaking out will not be easy, as Ladson-Billings (1998) makes clear:

Adopting and adapting [critical race theory] as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in

education *and* propose radical solutions for addressing it. We will have to take bold and sometimes unpopular positions. We may be pilloried figuratively or, at least, vilified for these stands. (p. 27)

Experiences that have long troubled us as teachers speak through the vignettes in this article. We recognise that doctoral study has afforded us time to research, think through and theorise forces that shape our experiences as educators. Postgraduate study has raised our awareness of the complexities presented to ethnically marginalised students in Aotearoa and we feel compelled to help forge a pathway through the challenges. In this article, the methodology of fictionalised shared autoethnography and a framework of critical race theory has supported a critical examination of our educational experiences. In doing so, we acknowledge the subtle power of racism and the ongoing damage to marginalised students perpetuated through a colour-blind discourse and the phenomenon of racial silencing.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Associate Professor Joanna Kidman for her feedback on draft versions of this article.

Glossary

Aotearoa	Māori name for New Zealand; lit., “land of the long white cloud”
haka	posture dance, to dance, perform the haka
kapa haka	concert party, haka group, Māori cultural group
Māori	Indigenous people of New Zealand
Pākehā	New Zealanders of European descent

Pākehātanga	Pākehā worldviews and practices
Pasifika	term coined by government agencies to describe migrants from the Pacific region and their descendants who now call New Zealand home
Poly Club	cultural group that promotes positive identity and social and cultural connectedness for Pasifika youth
te reo Māori	the Māori language

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