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Toward Inclusionary Practices in the Education of Nurses: A Critique of Transcultural Nursing Theory

For over a decade research that addresses inclusive education has examined the social organization of knowledge (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Campbell & Manicom, 1995; Harding, 1992, Smith, 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1996), access to educational institutions and programs (Blackmore & Kenway, 1993; Reynolds & Young, 1995), curricular reform (Gaskell & McLaren, 1991; Gaskell, McLaren, & Novogrodsky, 1989), chilly classroom climates (Chilly Collective, 1995; Sandler, Silverberg, & Hall, 1996), and strategies for teaching and learning (Acker, 1994; Briskin, 1991; Dei, 1996a, 1996b; Lather, 1991; Manicom, 1992; McCormick, 1994). Feminists and critical theorists concerned with advancing the agenda of inclusive education speak about how women and other marginalized groups affect and are affected by exclusionary practices in education. Underlying this research is an assumption that how we come to know (or not know) ourselves is discoverable in and mediated by institutional texts, images, policies, and structural processes. That is to say, dominant educational knowledge systems organize how we construct ourselves and others as gendered and male or female, racialized and white or black, straight or gay, able-bodied or disabled, valued or disrespected, powerful or powerless. Generally, students and faculty who see themselves and their values, beliefs, and interests represented and protected in institutional knowledges feel included and powerful. Conversely, students and faculty who do not see themselves represented in institutionalized knowledges generally feel excluded and oppressed in and by the educational system.

The primary purpose of this research is to extend the dialogue about inclusive education into nursing education by engaging in the first anti-racist critique of transcultural nursing theory (TCN). Drawing on the works of Dei (1996a, 1996b), Fine, Weis, Powell, and Wong, (1997), Fine and Wise (1993), Frankenberg (1993, 1997), McCarthy and Crichlow (1993), and others I examine how TCN embodies, imparts, and reinforces the dominant social discourses (values, beliefs, language, and political interests) about race, ethnicity, culture, and racism and organizes the everyday lives of white and minoritized nursing students and faculty. Specifically, this research addresses three questions: (a) What are the explicit and implicit definitions of race, ethnicity, culture, and racism constructed in transcultural nursing theory? (b) How, if at all, do nurs-

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ing students and faculty take up or challenge these ways of thinking about race, ethnicity, culture, and racism? (c) What common ground, if any, underlies the principles and practices of transcultural nursing education and anti-racism education as pedagogical approaches to social difference and racial oppression?

One impetus for this research arises from my interest in complicating nurses' location as a female subordinate in health care by looking at how other power relations organize the educational preparation of nurses and, in turn, organize nursing practice. In doing this research I am also taking up the challenge to examine the unearned benefits and privileges that accrue to me as a white educator in a racialized educational system. If knowledge is a conduit for power then I must critically examine how I question, use, and give authority to knowledge in my teaching practice and in my writing. These foci combined with the early outcomes of some preliminary work produced a second and parallel purpose.

In the early stages of this research I examined cultural sensitivity as an organizing principle in the nursing curriculum at an Ontario community college (Gustafson, 1998). Cultural sensitivity, a core theme of transcultural nursing theory (Kozier, Erb, Blais, & Wilkinson, 1995) was adopted by the nursing faculty in the mid 1980s as a response to increasing cultural diversity in the community and student populations. I argued that cultural sensitivity is a liberal response to race relations that organizes and reproduces whiteness and white racial identity as a dominant, centered, absent presence in nursing texts. Shilling (1993) first used the phrase "absent presence" (p. 19) to refer to the status of the body in sociological theory, but the term is applicable to constructions of whiteness and white racial identity in nursing texts. Whiteness and white racial identity are absent in the sense that they lie outside the legitimate concerns of nursing education and theorizing. At the same time, whiteness and white racial identity are present in the sense that they are at the centre of and "nourish" (p. 19) the ideology and system of racism.

The practical issue that arose from that preliminary work was pedagogical: How does one facilitate the process of making the invisible visible to white students and faculty who have learned not to see it? I concluded that this requires a "contrapuntal reading of the text" or a conscious effort to "read against the grain." To facilitate this critical exercise, I am generating and will test an instrument that supports nursing faculty and students in recognizing and examining unproblematized assumptions and beliefs about cultural diversity and social difference. The structure and format of the instrument draws on the works of Eichler (1991, 1997) and Eichler, Gustafson, and Pompetzki (1999) who developed a set of diagnostic questions for recognizing sexism in research. This instrument for recognizing overt and hidden forms of racism is being formulated so that it may be applicable to other texts beyond nursing.

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