

LEARNING, DIFFERENCE, EMBODIMENT: Personal and Collective Transformations¹

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Abstract

Background: This paper is based on a graduate course entitled, 'Toward an integrative approach to equity in higher education' offered at a Canadian university for the first time in 2002. The course attempted to integrate critical pedagogy theories with notions of embodied learning in order to develop an integrative praxis of educational equity. The paper discusses the unique learning processes undertaken by the authors, including the instructor.

Focus of discussion and arguments: The paper documents four students' learning journeys, which varied according to their racialized, class, and prior educational backgrounds, social positioning, and professions. It is organized around two major themes. The first theme that unites their learning experience, ironically, is their different perceptions and experiences of the course. Difference thus became a point of convergence and unification. Another major feature concerns their understanding, incorporation and resistance of the idea and practice of embodiment. The instructor argues that in spite of their apparent divergence, what unifies western liberal, progressive and radical education is their overriding focus on developing the learner's intellectual skills. The privileging of the intellect, simplistically equated with the mind, over the body-spirit, has led to a bifurcation of theory and practice. An integrative approach attempts to hold the mind, body and spirit in balance in the learning process. She argues that social change is only possible when learners are able to confront their own beliefs and actions with compassion and without judgment.

Conclusion: The authors conclude that learning is an open and indeterminate process that cannot be prescribed. Much of what they learned arose out of disagreement, discomfort and tension. Being attentive to the sense, both physical and emotional, of tension and discomfort constitutes the turning point of the authors' collective learning journey.

Keywords: learning, difference, embodiment

學習、差異、主體經歷性

摘要

背景: 這篇論文以一所加拿大大學2002年首次教授的一門研究所課程為基礎。這門課程名為「邁向高等教育平等的整合途徑」。這門課試圖將批判教育理論與體歷學習的概念加以整合，從而發展一種教育平等的整合實踐。這篇論文將討論作者們（包括授課者）在課程中所經歷的獨特學習歷程。

討論重點: 這篇論文記錄四名學生的學習經歷。他們的經歷因為他們的種族、階級、教育背景、社會位置、專業而有所差異。這篇文章圍繞兩個主題展開。第一個貫穿他們學習經歷的主題，有意思的是，是他們對這門課不同的感受與經驗。這些差異成融合與整合的焦點。另一個主題是有關他們對學習主體經歷性這個概念，在意義與實踐上的理解、吸收、與抵觸。授課者認為儘管西方自由主義教育、進步教育與激進教育之間有很明顯的差異，他們都過度關注學習者知性技巧的發展。一味強調智慧——智慧簡化為心智，而貶抑身體與靈性，造成理論與實踐的二元對立。我們所謂的整合途徑認為在學習過程中，心智、身體與靈性同樣重要。作者們認為社會變革只有在學習者能够用心感受他人的境域，克制主觀臆斷，不斷挑戰他們自己的信念與行動的情況下，才有可能實現。

結論: 作者們認為學習是個開放且不定過程，無法事前預設。學習者所學的很多來自於彼此之間的爭議、不舒服的經歷與緊張的關係。對身體與情緒上的緊張與不舒服的關注成為作者們集體學習歷程的轉捩點。

關鍵詞: 學習，差異，體歷性

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Introduction

This paper documents, explores and discusses the unique learning processes undertaken by the authors (the instructor and four students) during a graduate course entitled, “Toward an Integrative Approach to Equity in Higher Education,” offered in a Canadian university in the fall term of 2002. The course, which examined issues of equity, specifically how sexism, racism, class, and other relations operate in educational settings, was offered for the first time. In addition to examining how critical pedagogy theorized and addressed these relations, the instructor, Roxana Ng, wanted to incorporate meditative practices from eastern traditions into the curriculum based on her own experience as a minority female faculty teaching in the North American university system (Ng, 1998). Her teaching and activism indicated that frequently there is a disjuncture between people’s beliefs and values, and their patterns of behaviour; that is, there is a bifurcation between theory and practice. The oppressed may unwittingly adopt the modes of behaviour of the oppressor (Ng, 2004). Roxana sees reflexivity – the knower/actor’s ability to reflect on her beliefs and action in a non-judgmental way – to be central in disrupting taken-for-granted ways of thinking and acting, and therefore critical to social change.

The course objective was to challenge to examine critically the theory and practice of educational equity, and to interrogate how educators’ own practices may contribute to the (re)production of inequality. It consisted of four major components:

1. Course readings were wide-ranging and included scholarly writings on gender, race and ability in higher education, power dynamics in educational settings, theorization on feelings and emotions, and readings on mindfulness and embodied education. Materials on the political economy of higher education and a paper on integrative equity (Ng, 2003a) framed the orientation of the course. While writings on oppression and power are accepted as part of the critical pedagogy tradition, materials on mindfulness and embodiment in education were harder to come by. They were also more difficult to incorporate into the course because they had not become part of the legitimate curriculum in higher education. Roxana has argued, in her previous writing, that intellectual encounters are not only the confrontation of disembodied ‘minds’, but also a confrontation of bodies that are differently inscribed. Thus, the quality of our intellectual encounters cannot be separated from who we are as gendered, racialized, and classed subjects with varying dis/ability (Ng, 1998). This piece of writing was part of the reading materials aimed at introducing students to the notion of embodied learning.
2. Mindfulness exercises included physical and meditative exercises that had two objectives. First, insisting that exercises be part of the curriculum reinforces the fact that we are embodied learners, that learning does not only involve the mind. Secondly, in many eastern traditions, meditation is used as a discipline that focuses the mind, enhancing our capacity to reflect on our thought and action without judgment – what Buddhism refers to as non-attachment (rather than detachment). The exercises were used as part of the reflective tool in the course.
3. Journaling was included as part of the course requirement and had two purposes. First, students were asked to summarize the major argument(s) of a piece to develop their comprehension and summary skills. This part of the journal gave the instructor a sense of students’ understanding of the materials. Secondly, journaling was another way for students to reflect on their reactions (feelings and emotions) to the materials, and how the materials informed *both* their comprehension of theory and their behaviour and practice – another reflective tool that closes the gap between theory and practice.

4. Small group work leading to the development of an action plan was integral to the progression of the course. The intent of the action plan was for students to take the theories they learned and apply them to a concrete situation. Thus, the action plan had to be realistic and feasible. Each plan had to spell out the operating assumptions of the group, identify a scenario the group wanted changed, and develop a concrete way of changing the scenario; that is, another method of closing the theory-practice bifurcation. Another objective of the small group work was to promote and enhance collaborative learning, something that is not usually encouraged in graduate work, which tends to be highly individualistic and competitive.

Altogether nine students, all women, participated in the course, which took place on a Tuesday evening over a twelve-week period between September and December 2002.² About a third of the way through the course, Roxana received a call for submission for a conference that seemed to address many of the issues we were dealing with in the course.³ She asked whether the group would like to make a submission to present at the conference, and upon positive feedback, submitted an abstract which was approved for presentation. Given people's busy lives and the degree of involvement in their programs of study, participation in the presentation was, by necessity, voluntary. The presentation⁴ was very well received, and members of the audience encouraged us to develop it into a paper. Meanwhile, Roxana, Ann and Mary made scholarly presentations in conferences based on this presentation and their work in the course.⁵ In June, 2003, we, the presenters, met to discuss whether we wished to proceed with writing a paper together, and there was consensus to do so.⁶ This paper is the result of that decision.

What emerged out of our collaborative effort, as we struggled with how to formulate and write the paper, was our *difference*. Indeed, our different histories and biographies, and our different ways of interpreting and taking up the course materials, are what makes our learning interesting, unique, and worthy of sharing and writing about. Our reflection on the processes of writing and learning thus form the basis of our discussion here.

²Part of the integrative approach was to include food in the class. Since this class started at 5:30 p.m., at the end of a work day, many students came to class hungry and tired. Both the physical exercises and the sharing of food served to revive class members in an otherwise never ending routine of work and study. At the equity conference where we presented our work (see next footnote), we discovered that, according to Maori researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith, the sharing of food among Maori students also served to disrupt the normal way of conducting university business that was based on White male European norms.

³The conference entitled, 'Excellence through Equity: Confronting the Tensions in Universities,' was organized by the University of Toronto in March 21-23, 2003.

⁴The title of the presentation bears the same name as the course. The presenters were Roxana Ng, Ann Matthews, Mary Patton, Diane Tyczynski, Lesia Waschuk and Joanne Wong. We requested a full session intending to have a dialogue with the audience about various aspects of the course and our learning process. Instead, we were organized into a one-hour panel with another presentation, which made it impossible for us to address in depth the multiplicity and complexity of the topic and our respective experiences.

⁵Ann Matthews and Mary Patton presented a paper entitled, 'Working with power dynamics that silence' based on their action plan for the course at the CSSHE congress (May 31, 2003). Roxana Ng did a presentation on 'Embodying equity in higher education: Toward an integrative approach' that reported on the course and our collaborative conference presentation at the CASWE meeting on May 29, 2003. Both meetings were part of the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Congress (CSSHC) annual meeting in Halifax, May 28 to June 4, 2004.

⁶Due to personal circumstances, Diane dropped out of the writing project fairly early on.

Writing Collaboratively

Writing collaboratively is not easy. It is harder when the writers occupy different power positions in terms of age, race, ethnicity, and status.⁷ The fact that the course addressed the issue of power relations made the writers especially sensitive to power differentials within the group. Between the summer of 2003 and early 2004, we met several times to discuss how to write the paper, whether we should write with one voice or allow multiple voices to be heard, whether we should differentiate between the instructor and the students, and so forth. We began by using the short pieces (up to two pages) that we wrote for the presentation at the Excellence through Equity Conference hoping to find common themes that would unite the paper. However, when we started to discuss what the final paper would be about, it became clear that there was no consensus on a central theme that would give coherence to the different pieces of writing. The chief common experience was our participation in the course and the conference.

Although we disagreed, got stuck, met again, and made slow progress over the summer and fall of 2003, we remained doggedly persistent about proceeding with the project. At one point, Roxana decided to withdraw because she feared that her presence as the instructor would interfere with the spontaneity and direction of the group. We found that one way of carrying on with the project was to focus on the tasks at hand and side-step issues of group dynamics and difference. In spite of the lack of consensus, we eventually – months later – came up with an outline and partial pieces we could live with and work on. Pieces of writing were circulated by email and compiled. At this point, we met for a writing weekend in February 2004 to finalize the format and content of the paper. We continued to meet a few times afterwards to fine-tune the draft paper.

In terms of structure and format, we decided that the introduction and conclusion would provide a (more or less) unified collective voice, but there would be sections where our own voices would be clearly identified. We decided that the instructor would not write a separate narrative, since the first couple of sections of the paper, by necessity, contain many of her ideas for the course. The writing weekend was devoted to a critique of the individual narratives, to see how they could be improved and share a common format in spite of our diverse experiences. We also discussed what we could conclude from our individual and collective journeys. The conclusion, written by Roxana, contains the essence of this discussion.

Difference and Learning: What Do They Have in Common?

When we reviewed the individual pieces, it became obvious that the primary commonality we shared, if it can be called that, is difference. We came to the course, and hence the writing process, with different biographies, academic backgrounds, and life experiences. Throughout our interactions we held different, albeit not irreconcilable, opinions. To make our collective project possible, we gave ourselves two overall guidelines. First, we would write about how we individually embodied the materials provided by the course. Second, we would focus our individual narratives on our unique experience of embodied learning. These narratives

⁷Apart from the obvious status difference between the instructor/professor and the students, the students were in different programs (two were doctoral students and two were Master's students). The Master's students and one doctoral student have since graduated. The group was also differentiated by full-time and part-time student status, occupations and work, and life experiences, which complicated how we interacted with one another.

would reveal that we took different things out of our shared learning experience in the course and in the writing process. As we reflected on the learning that we documented in our individual narratives, we not only saw that difference was what brought us together, but more importantly, that learning could not be prescribed regardless of the instructor's intent and curriculum design; it is an open, indeterminate process the outcome of which could not be predicted with certainty at the outset. We will discuss our discovery of the learning process and our collective learning as a result of writing this paper in more depth in the conclusion. Meanwhile, we share with you stories of our learning journey. These narratives reflect ways in which four of us (the students) embodied shared classroom learning differently in our everyday lives.

ANN

I came into this course having taken a number of graduate courses that focused on social inequality and equity. During my Master's and doctoral programs, I have tried to understand how pedagogical practices in the higher education classroom reproduce taken-for-granted assumptions that normalize social inequality. Prior to pursuing a degree at this university, I taught cosmetic retail management courses to all female classes at a community college in Ontario. The courses I took at this university made me realize that my pedagogical practices at the community college failed to acknowledge issues of gender and equity that might affect learning in the classroom. In effect, I engaged in a pedagogy that encouraged the female students I taught to accept the systems that marginalized them in education, work, and their social environment. In her course, Roxana introduced me to a pedagogy that encouraged me not only to think critically about issues of equity and how they influence classroom learning, but also to consider the ways in which learning is and can become an embodied experience.

As the course progressed, I came to realize that the first step in integrating equity into classroom pedagogy is a questioning of the self. This self-reflective process requires an understanding not only of the mind, but also of the body and the spirit. During the course, the term embodiment was used to capture the notions of bringing the whole self into the learning process and embodying learning within the whole self. Throughout the course I struggled to understand the concept of embodiment and how it applies to my life. I questioned how I could embrace embodiment, think it, feel it, and integrate it into my being. How do I embody my learning and experiences? What are the implications of my doing so?

In my personal journey towards understanding embodiment, I turned to the course readings that encapsulated the concept. Ng (1998) suggests that both the mind-intellect and the body-spirit should be an integral part of the classroom learning process, that neither should be privileged over the other. Thus, if I am to embody my learning and experiences, I need to integrate the mind-intellect and the body-spirit. This requires that I engage in a self-reflective process that recognizes the interdependence of all parts of my being, and develops an understanding of the ways in which the mind, body, and spirit interact to create the values and biases that inform my thinking, feelings, and actions. Furthermore, I need not only to have an understanding of the self, but also an understanding of the self in relationships with others. It is through my interactions with others that I am able to see myself in many different dimensions, and subsequently can begin to locate intersections of inequality and privilege in others and myself.

In a journal entry at the end of the course I remarked, “I have noticed that my reaction and reflections in my journal deal with the articles on an intellectual rather than a personal level” (Matthews, 2002). I was seeking to understand embodiment and other concepts about equity and learning at an intellectual level. I was using a positivistic form of reasoning that objectifies the concept and separates it from the self. I have come to realize that my reaction to the course material is a product of my socialization into a traditional form of patriarchal Western intellectual thought that sustains a mind/body binary. This binary is contrary to the notion of embodiment because it is “founded on a dualist mode of thinking according to which the mind is conceived as distinct from the body and superior to it” (Weedon, 2003, p. 113).

Throughout my life, I have supported the mind/body binary by privileging the mind and by associating it with reason, rationality, and a detached objective form of intellectual thinking. I related the body to emotion and the senses, often with irrationality. I perceived the body to be the place where I had a subjective reaction to my experiences that was less valid than an objective viewpoint. Bai (2001) suggests an alternative to the mind/body binary. She argues that the conceptual dominates our minds and that we need to pay more attention to our senses. “Education for embodiment is about disciplining ourselves to see rather than look at; to hear rather than listen; to feel rather than react; and so on” (Bai, 2001, pp. 92-93). Bai states that a “pedagogy of mindfulness”, which embodies education in the form of sensory experiences, overcomes disembodiment and integrates the mind-intellect with the body-spirit. If I adopt Bai’s notion of embodiment, classroom learning must become more than an intellectual exercise. As a teacher, I must become aware of how the sensory experiences of students might interact with the intellectual experience to enhance or diminish learning. But first, I must understand how my interpretation of my experiences, how the privileges I enjoy as a white, middle-class, university educated woman, and how the oppression I have experienced as a woman, shape my pedagogy.

The failure to acknowledge that experiences of the body influence and shape the processes of the mind meant that I did not acknowledge the connection between the body and the mind and how this might affect learning. The course, the writing of this paper, and the patience and help of my colleagues has helped me realize that I embody all my experiences, although I may not be aware of the process or its implications in respect to learning. My reluctance to move beyond the mind-body binary was a product of my embodiment of taken-for-granted assumptions that maintain this binary. I saw these assumptions as natural rather than as socially constructed. Having reached this level of embodied awareness, I can no longer avoid the discomfort involved in learning to recognize my own biases, and the power relationships that shape my social interactions and classroom pedagogy. I can no longer invoke the “right not to know” (Feldthusen, 1995). Mind and body cannot be separated in life, nor can they be separated in the classroom. Each influences the other and both are an integral part of the learning process. The interaction between the mind-intellect and body-spirit, in a particular context, can either enhance or impede learning.

My efforts to understand embodiment have resulted in an attempt to understand the relationships between the mind and body that influence the ways in which I think and act. My experiences in the course and my subsequent self-reflection have brought me to an understanding of embodiment as a way of learning that is different from intellectual learning. Hocking, Haskell and Linds (2001a) see “learning as an unfoldment” (p. 3), as a process that

engages the whole body in “a sensory interplay between us and the worlds we are part of” (p. 3). They liken the process of embodied learning to a dance and suggest that learning comes from active participation in the dance (Hocking et al., 2001a; 2001b). I find “dance” a useful metaphor for embodiment and learning because it captures the notion of movement, fluidity, and participation; it is an experience that can engage the whole being. When I dance, with myself or with others, I can feel any range of emotions and those emotions are expressed in the way that I move my body. I can also use my mind (my intellect) to process those emotions and translate them into movement. The notion of dance, whether it is literal or metaphorical, opens up the possibility of transcending the mind/body binary. “The meandering between and amongst bodies means that we must move beyond purely intellectual understandings of co-experience” (Hocking et al., 2001a, p. 8). Hocking et al. (2001b) also suggest that embodied knowing cannot be taught, that it comes from an active engagement with the learning process. While I concur with these authors, I would like to suggest that my personal experience, as it has been discussed in this narrative, indicates that the dance can be choreographed in such a way that students are able to gain an awareness of how experiences are embodied and the ways in which this might influence learning. However, as the narratives in this paper reveal, the ways in which learning is embodied and subsequently taken up in our lives is individual and personal.

LESIA

I am a dentist by profession, now employed full-time in a professionally related non-clinical role. I pursued a Master’s Degree specializing in health professional education on a part-time basis. I took Roxana’s course following the birth of my daughter (my first child), while I was on maternity leave. It was the final course for my Master’s program. The course was a natural step in my learning journey as events and changes in my personal life had heightened my awareness of equity issues and increased my receptiveness to exploring embodiment and mindfulness.

I experienced pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period (including nursing) as physical processes laden with emotional and spiritual meaning. My transition to motherhood required intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual learning on many fronts. The discussion in this narrative focuses specifically on those elements of my learning journey that relate to my struggles with body image. This struggle began during my first pregnancy and continued into the postpartum period. I use Rice and Russell’s (1995) definition of “body image” in my discussion. They describe it as “the messages we receive about our bodies, verbally and non-verbally, from other people, systems, and institutions; our perceptions of our bodies as they are shaped by surrounding systemic forces; and our resulting feelings about our bodies and ourselves” (Rice & Russell, 1995, p.18).

In this narrative, I will discuss those parts of the course that facilitated the resolution of my struggle with body image. I chose to write the final paper for this course on body image. The course readings and my own research and reflection provided me with information that was useful in understanding body image intellectually. As I engaged in this process, I discovered that body image is an equity issue along multiple axes of difference. This particular dimension was not addressed in the course. My meditative practice provided a means of resolving my personal body image issues and understanding my privilege along these axes of difference. Parts of this narrative are excerpts and adaptations from my final paper and my section of our joint

presentation at the conference, “Excellence Through Equity: Confronting the Tensions in Universities”.

Before my pregnancy, I had been professionally identified and was ambitious in my academic and career goals, and I directed my attention and effort at the pursuit of these goals. I had not been particularly concerned with my physical appearance. I did not devote much time to maintaining my appearance or thinking about it. Rich (1986) writes that many intellectual women

...have insisted that they were ‘human beings’ first and women only incidentally, have minimized their physicality and their bonds with other women. The body has been made so problematic for women that it has often seemed easier to shrug it off and travel as a disembodied spirit (p.40).

During my pregnancy, I discovered, for the first time, both my physicality and my bonds with other women. As my body changed, I directed my attention and learning towards the physical changes in my body and the events of pregnancy, childbirth, and, later, nursing. I read extensively on the topics of pregnancy, childbirth, motherhood, body image and female sexuality, and shared my feelings about pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period with mothers in my personal, professional and academic circles. I discovered that many of them had shared similar experiences and feelings about all aspects of the transition to motherhood, including their struggle with body image. From the different accounts in the literature I read, it seemed that “women of all ages and body sizes struggle with body image issues” (Rice & Russell, 1995, p. 19). The focus of my personal struggle with body image was my feeling that the changes in my body made me less desirable sexually than before my pregnancy. Wolf (1991) discusses the objectification and alienation that women experience as a result of “the strong cultural influence that positions women outside their bodies to look at women alone as sexual objects” (p. 155). In my transition to motherhood, my focus shifted from a subjective experience of sexuality to a perception of my body as undesirable when measured against the taken-for-granted notion of the cultural beauty ideal. This was another, more specific, example of the separation between my mind and my body.

Rich (1986), in describing her transition to motherhood, writes that she carried away “a determination to heal – insofar as an individual woman can, as much as possible with other women – the separation between mind and body” (p.40). In my meditation practice, I found the means of learning to inhabit my changing body and of healing the separation between my mind and body. I had been interested in Buddhism and had meditated on-and-off for a number of years. Meditation became more consistent during my pregnancy and the postpartum period, and was done in conjunction with prenatal and postpartum yoga routines. I, therefore, enjoyed participating in the mindfulness exercises in Roxana’s class. During the course, I also began a regular personal practice of meditation following some of the techniques described by Batchelor (1997). Meditation on the breath, in the Buddhist tradition, has helped me learn to be present in my (changed) body. Meditation has helped me begin to develop my conscious awareness (mindfulness) and to observe my complex, varied, and ambivalent thoughts and feelings, including those about being a mother and inhabiting this female body. Meditation has helped me see these thoughts and feelings as fleeting. I am gradually learning to let thoughts and feelings go without engaging with them while meditating. However, my progress in achieving moments

of mindfulness in daily life is considerably slower. Still, I feel that I have resolved my struggle with my body image: overall, I am grateful for having been born female and having experienced the physical events of motherhood (i.e., pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing). When I was nursing and at many other times when I am with my daughter, I try to bring my conscious awareness, in all its dimensions (physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual), to the experience of the moment.

Rice and Russell (1995) and the Boston Women's Health Book Collective (1988) identify body image as an equity issue in relation to the multiple axes of difference. Rice and Russell argue that women's bodies "are more or less valuable...depending on their social identities and the social meaning of their physical attributes, including their race, class, sexuality, age, occupation, fertility, physical abilities, etc." (p.28). These physical attributes position a woman "in a more or less privileged position on the hierarchy of bodies and sliding scale of humanity" (Rice & Russell, 1995, p.31). The Boston Women's Health Book Collective (1988) writes that in order "to change the societal values underlying body image... we need to focus our attention on the forces that drive wedges between us women: racism, sexism, ableism, ageism" (p.40). Reading and reflecting on the course materials and researching for my final paper illuminated my location and the privilege inherent in my race, class, citizenship, ability, and sexual orientation. In my final paper, I acknowledged my relatively privileged position, and limited my analysis of body image to factors relating to my personal experience.

Through my meditation practice, I found the means to understand my location, the meaning of my privilege, and my responsibilities to other women. While I had always been grateful for the circumstances of my birth and life, understanding intuitively that I was privileged, I was not able to grasp the full extent or meaning of my privilege until I began to meditate regularly during the course. In meditation, I have begun to see the boundaries of the self as illusory and to understand the connections between myself and other people. I had, in the past, experienced sexism and am sometimes still angry when I believe that this may prevent me from achieving my goals. Meditation on these thoughts and feelings and on my goals has helped me understand that many of my personal goals have arisen from an egoistic (self-centred) sense of entitlement, which I believe is taken-for-granted in my privileged location. I am slowly beginning to develop an awareness of this sense of entitlement, both while meditating and in my daily life. Because I believe that "combating oppression [is] a collective responsibility" (Ng, 2003a, p. 215) and that "changing consciousness...is a process arrived at through confrontation and struggle with our own consciousness that encompasses both our ideas and practice – in short, our consciousness is our way of being in the world" (Ng, 1998, p.6), I have developed new goals which include ongoing meditation and community action on issues related to body image and more broadly to women's health. Since completing the course, I have continued to reflect on these goals in meditation and have continued my reading on equity issues related to difference. I have also taken the first steps toward my goal of community action by making and helping to collect donations for community organizations active in women's health.

MARY

When I returned to university for doctoral studies in 2002, after working as a nurse educator for many years, I began a journey of learning that expanded my worldview. What is most consequential for me about participating in this course is that the learning process provided

a means for me to integrate my new learning with previous learning. At the same time, the course served as a building block for me to move in new directions. I became aware of my limited knowledge about race and diverse ways of knowing. This limitation restricted my understanding of interpersonal and systemic power relations and was a drawback for working with students from varied backgrounds. To expand my knowledge, I subsequently enrolled in two courses: Black Feminist Thought, and Aboriginal and Indigenous Knowledges. While participating in these two courses, I experienced the discomfort of being “a minority White woman” in a class of people of colour. This discomfort, I learned, was minor compared to the inequity and marginalization that people of colour experience in everyday life. The narratives shared by the women of colour in these courses reinforced, for me, that one’s location in life economically, culturally, and so forth has a direct correlation to one’s life experiences and worldview. However, it was the prior learning in Roxana’s course that first challenged me to consider that my values, beliefs and behaviour reflect not only my own experiences but also the changing societal and political ideology. My “self” or subjectivity is embedded within the current organization and practices of social power and is not entirely of my own design. It was necessary for me to examine the connections between subjectivity, multiple life experiences, and power relations, and recognize that I embody my experiences both consciously and unconsciously to form my subjectivity.

As I reflected upon the process of embodiment, subjectivity, power relations, and difference during the course, it was hard to admit that I have certain thoughts and beliefs and behave in certain ways. An excerpt from my journal is useful for appreciating the value of reflection for my self-understanding.

The readings and class discussion have drawn my attention to my own behavior and thoughts about difference so that I am examining my own beliefs carefully. It is one thing to say “Oh I am not biased” yet realize on the other hand that I respond to people differently. I am taking this examination further and asking myself “What am I feeling and why?” and then proceeding to “Where did that belief come from and is there any basis for it”. This process will take time because I have absorbed “common sense” knowledge. It is hard to admit that I am biased. I have friends, teachers, colleagues, both men and women, people of color, for whom I have admiration, love, and respect. I recognize their difference. I realize that my feelings and thoughts about the people I know are different from my response to someone I may see on the subway. I think it is connected to my knowledge of the person. My thoughts are not consistent. I look inside myself and see what I do not want to see. If I never look, I will never change (Patton, 2002).

While change is desirable, there is no easy pathway. I needed to consider my location as a White, middle class, married, university-educated Canadian woman, to which I had never given much thought. My father emigrated from Northern Ireland and my mother emigrated as a child with her parents from Germany. White ancestry, yes, but not without its own blemishes. During the World Wars, the German people who immigrated to Canada experienced discrimination, as did the Irish people who were considered “white trash”. As Goldberg (1993) points out, there are many types of racism, and racisms change over time. Today, I am considered a White privileged woman. I wondered: what does it mean to be White? How is it

that Whiteness is socially constructed as the natural state of being? How is being White affecting my teaching practices, my learning, my interactions with others, and my life?

These questions inspired me to confront my embodied Whiteness (how I am in this world) and to examine my ways of thinking, being, and doing. A friend's comment, a man of colour, helped me begin to see the multiple and different ways of interpreting and experiencing the world. He explained that every time he entered a room he was aware of being different in a room of White people and he always observed how many people of colour were in the room. I had never given any thought to the meanings attached to my skin colour. Therefore, my final paper for this course was a deconstruction of my Whiteness. I believed that an examination of the social construction of my Whiteness would increase my understanding of my thoughts about being White and heighten my awareness of the power relations in interpersonal interactions. To speak of being White is to take away some of the taken-for-granted, normalcy of being White.

In my examination of Whiteness, I learned that there are dimensions attached to being White that include: a location of advantages and racial privileges that are a specific standpoint from which I look at myself, others, and society; and a set of normative cultural practices that are usually unmarked, unnamed, and systemic (Frankenberg, 1993). As I became more attentive to the privileges and superiority attached to being White, hook's (2000) argument "[m]any white women who daily exercise race privilege lack awareness that they are doing so" (p. 56) began to have more meaning. I acknowledged that although I do not feel superior because I am White, I may be perceived as being superior, or that I may be unaware of being superior because I have embodied common sense norms. I learned that it is necessary to view Whiteness from different perspectives. I realized that my perceptions are limited by my experiences, and to interpret others' experiences according to my values and beliefs is limiting. I must be mindful of others' values, beliefs, perspectives, and experiences. This is easier to acknowledge than to embody in my everyday life.

As I reflected on being White, on the role of difference in power relations, and on developing alternative ways of being and doing, I found (and still do) that my thoughts are frequently ambiguous and confused. However, Hocking's and his colleagues' (2001a) explanation, that embodied learning experiences may involve conflict and struggle in an effort to open up possibilities for increasing awareness and engagement, provides encouragement. I was able to synthesize my learning and to concede that I am still influenced by a "common sense" and scientific way of thinking from my nursing career and my previous education. A tension exists between the two ways of thinking that shape my subjectivity. On one hand, I desire to embody learning, and to create life experiences and teaching practices that involve the total body; on the other hand, I have primarily learned to learn with my intellect. I recognize that my everyday actions and teaching practices may not be as equitable as I think, or as mindful and attentive to embodiment as I desire. I need to understand how inequity becomes an unquestioned norm based on socially constructed power dynamics of race, class, gender, position, ability, and so forth, before I am able to recognize how these elements are played out in everyday life, as well as in education.

At this point in my learning process, self-awareness is the focus of my embodied learning. I am more aware of the differences in power relations among diverse students and between

teacher and students, as well as the influence of organized power dynamics within the education system. Nevertheless, I do not reserve awareness of the significance of difference and power dynamics for the educational setting. The knowledge is embodied within me, so that in everyday life, I have begun to recognize how my Whiteness and my location contribute to the power dynamics of interactions affecting not only my behaviour but also the behaviour of people in my presence. I am more observant of how individual differences affect power dynamics, and I recognize more instances of biased behaviour (mine, someone else's, or systemic) than I might have before. Yet, I do not always know how to deal with racist or sexist behaviour. I continue to work at integrating mind-body learning into my daily life, exploring my enactment of Whiteness, and recognizing the shifting power relations of interacting elements of difference. The conceptualization of power as a set of dynamic relations encompassing multiple elements of difference helps me to understand that not all positions are equal in society or in a classroom, and that embodying equity in everyday activities and in teaching and learning practices is an ongoing challenge.

JOANNE

I am a secondary school Visual Arts educator who teaches in the York Region District School Board. After a stressful encounter with a White teacher in my third year of teaching, I became more aware of the position I repeatedly reduce myself to when I work with those who tend to discriminate against me and exclude me. Angry with myself for not standing up to injustices, I began searching for spaces to develop a personal voice. I enrolled in a graduate program and chose Roxana's course for the simple reason that the professor listed in the handbook had an Asian last name. The word "equity" in the course title was also a factor for my choice, as I believed it was something I needed to search for. The following narrative is based on my Major Research Paper (MRP), which was a final requirement for my Masters of Education (M.Ed.) degree.

Growing up as a second-generation Chinese female in North America has always left me struggling to find an identity that I can call my own. It was especially difficult for me in public school where the dominant crowd consisted mostly of White privileged children. Although I am not able to recall the numerous incidents of discrimination, I can nevertheless remember repeatedly being isolated from other kids who were considered by the school to be "out-going" and "popular" individuals. These incidents of exclusion did not end when I graduated from elementary school, but instead, became more apparent as I grew older. My inability to find a comfortable niche in the public school system made it difficult for me to understand my culture and identity. This later led to feelings of disempowerment.

Having had difficulty understanding those in my immediate school community and in my desire to be embraced by my privileged peers, I attempted to construct my own identity by intentionally creating opportunities for myself to assimilate into Western culture. In order to contribute to the illusion that I was worthy of integration with the West, I repeatedly rejected Asians who had detectable differences from the dominant society in fear that they would jeopardize all I had worked so hard for. In fact, I still catch myself criticizing the Chinese more than I do other racialized groups for the way they talk, dress, and present themselves. It is as though, because I am so confused with my identity as a North American Asian who struggles to assimilate with the West, I can only pinpoint what I do *not* want to be when I evaluate others

similar to me. One can say that my practice of setting unreachable standards for my own racial group often parallels the standards that the White privileged “Other” set for me. Because I remain unclear of what *I* am, nor have the role models who embody what *I* aspire to be, I continue my search for a personal identity without clear objectives.

This confusion and directionless quest led me to expect the world from our Chinese professor. I expected her to be a symbol of society’s final acceptance of minorities as worthy of integration with the West, as she possessed not only formal authority in a post-secondary institution, but as well, the privilege that came with it. However, when I realized that her pedagogical practices were rather unconventional, I began to associate this instructor with the “other” Chinese from whom I had grown to disconnect myself. I started questioning her teaching tactics and came to the conclusion that she was too aggressive and radical for me to identify with, let alone respect as a role model. Aside from the professor I was the only other Asian in the course. I felt inadequate among my peers not only because they were White, but also because my past experiences informed me that they were probably also more mature, wealthy, intelligent, and well spoken than I. All my feelings of incompetence resurfaced and I quickly assumed a position of inferiority – a place I had become familiar with when among the unfamiliar. I became silent, removed, and fearful of any rejection that would further add to the injury of my self and spirit. However, although I appeared to sit in silence from week to week, my mind raced continually as I tried to make sense of my place in the class. I was in a situation of perpetual tension. I was different from the other students, but unwilling to identify with the person with whom I was most similar.

As I juxtaposed past incidents of exclusion with the sense of uneasiness I experienced in this course, I came to understand one’s identity, both racially and culturally, to be more transient than I had originally perceived it to be. I had always thought, for example, that racism was only imposed on the “Coloured” by the “Privileged”, but now I have come to recognize that racism is about power (Khayatt, 2001, p. 81). Because “Whiteness” is a socially constructed colour, its significance can also be altered and reduced to a standpoint – a place from which to look at oneself as “morally superior” (Kobayashi & Peake, 2000, p. 394). Similarly, I had always envisioned colonization to be the act of White people invading the space of the Coloured, but I now recognize that it is also a *standpoint*. “Whiteness”, “different from the visibility of *non-whiteness*”, is so transparent that it can morph into any form that it pleases. It exists in a classroom even when a White individual is not present (Alcoff, 1996, p. 8). Although marginalized throughout the years by those who tend to practice informal power over me, I now realize that the colonization embedded within me often surfaces when I least expect it. For example, what I believed was a justified “policing” and judgment of an Asian woman professor and her pedagogical practices was actually my marginalizing her simply for her race and gender. Had she approached the course in a more traditional manner, with formal lectures and controlled question and answer periods, or better yet, had she been a White middle-class male, it would have been much easier for me to accept her as one with rightful power (Hoodfar, 1997). However, through time, my willingness to question and deconstruct moments of discomfort allowed me to see beyond what I otherwise would not have been able to understand. I have come to realize that it is only when I begin with my personal experience that my theorizing can be authentic and reflective of my reality.

As an educator, I have come to recognize that the only way in which I can reconcile my identity as a visible minority woman in a dominant society is to initiate changes in my classroom. By using the authority I have been given as an educator, I can critically respond to my awareness of inequitable power relations by assisting students to do the same in the space of our classroom and in their personal lives. By deconstructing systemic racism and discriminatory established norms, we can stop the reproduction of hegemonic patriarchal ideals. Helping students to identify “colonialism” and power relations in their own lives and assisting them to discover and develop personal voices are important strategies for any educator interested in feminist and anti-racist pedagogy.

In order to problematize my classroom space, the issue of safety must also be addressed. Konradi describes this ongoing process to be one where “parameters of participation are made explicit, surprises removed or diminished, power relations specified to level hierarchies and to equally distribute responsibility among everyone present” (cited in Briskin, 2001, p. 36). Too many times when such a model is not established in the classroom, marginalized individuals, such as visible minorities, are made even more invisible. By providing opportunities for students to give voice, teachers get into the practice of accepting new ideas, and bringing to light the intersections of their identities that are often “rendered invisible” and insignificant (Khayatt, 2001). Having previously experienced unsafe classroom spaces and their detrimental effects, I have become intentional about disrupting, reconfiguring, redistributing, and equalizing dynamics in my classroom. Although some of the changes are simple, they can nonetheless play a powerful role in reshaping issues of safety. For example, by placing minority students in charge of simple, but high profile, tasks and responsibilities such as administering and/or collecting assignments and classroom materials, the privileged students get into the practice of having to rely on the minority students (to get their assignments back). By making minority students “subjects, rather than objects” and “imagers rather than the imagined”, student subjectivity and voice come to the forefront as they create their own life stories and tell of how “how the everyday has shaped their practice” (Henry, 1998, p. 159). By creating a space for the absent subject, and his or her experiences, individuals can thus be heard and valued for their authentic realities.

My passion to help students develop self-knowledge and understanding in the context of their own community is based in my personal experiences of growing up in a culturally unbalanced educational system, in being an Asian educator in a school that consists for the most part of immigrant ESL students, in participating in community work, and in liaising between students’ home life and school life. I am interested in the changing socio-cultural landscape in and around us. I want to help students untangle the misconceptions about *their* personal culture. For me, the purpose of teaching is not simply about *informing* students of everything they need to know about a particular subject matter, but rather *instilling* in them the value of personal interpretation and discovery. Taking active steps to create safer spaces whereby voices can be heard ‘without repercussion’ or silencing, and understanding students to be ‘embodied texts’ whereby clues are provided through verbal, non-verbal, physical, and meta-physical means are powerful ways in which the discursive regime of my classroom space can be (re)shaped. Such teaching celebrates connectedness and relevance, and values the fact that progression is not always linear.

Conclusion: Learning, Difference and Embodiment

At the beginning of this paper, we asserted that learning is an open and indeterminate process. This assertion is reflected in the narratives of the co-writers. Each took up a different aspect of the course materials and either questioned or integrated it into their teaching practice and everyday life. To conclude, we share with the reader our discoveries on processes of learning and difference and our views on what embodied learning may entail.

When we stated that learning is an open and uncertain journey, we refer to the fact that each of us took different things out of the same curriculum regardless of the instructor's intent. For instance, while the course drew attention to unequal power relations that operate along lines of gender, race, class, ability, age, and sexuality in social arrangements and interactional settings, it did not deal specifically with whiteness and privilege. However, two of the co-writers (Mary and Joanne) identified these as salient aspects of their discovery. Although the materials did not deal with body image, Lesia felt that this is an important element in the inequality between women and men. Another topic that was not explicitly addressed was the concept of "colonization". Although the concept did come up in discussions, it was part of the subtext in the readings. As Joanne poignantly pointed out, colonization is not only about the colonizers; it is also how dominant ideas and practices are normalized and become part of the thinking and being of the colonized – what Fanon (1963) refers to as the colonizer within, or internalized colonization. Thus, learning is not a process that can be pre-determined; people learn by association and along different pathways, depending on how their experience intersects with the pedagogical setting at a moment in time.

As we reflected and worked on the individual narratives, it also occurred to us that we "forgot" important aspects of the curriculum presented to us. For example, although in the course we learned that setting ground rules for how we interact with one another is one way of drawing attention to unequal power relations operative in interactional settings, we did not set ground rules for the writing process, and had to negotiate our way through the differences and tensions that emerged. When we got stuck, we did not resort to strategies we developed in the respective action plans as a resource for solving tension or transcending barriers. In spite of our belief in mindfulness, which was emphasized and practised in the course, we were not sufficiently mindful of each other's sensibility, desire, and need when we worked together. Our forgetfulness and lack of sensitivity only emerged as we reflected on our individual pieces of writing and as we brainstormed for the conclusion. We highlight them here in order to make visible the learning we did on our own and collectively, which is ongoing. As Ann, quoting Hocking et al. (2001a), pointed out, learning is a process of unfoldment. This statement became all the more poignant as we worked together.

Another discovery is that moments of discomfort promote, rather than discourage, learning. There is some agreement, in retrospect, that the course was not comfortable for most of us, including the professor. Ann was uneasy about the concept of embodiment and could not embrace it; Mary was challenged to think about her Whiteness and privilege; the course triggered Lesia's struggle with her changing role and body during pregnancy and after the birth of her daughter; Joanne's sense of her difference and exclusion in the course led to her subsequent exploration of how to de-colonize herself and her students; and Roxana had to navigate and make sense of the tensions created by the multiple and contradictory experiences that surfaced in the discussion. Thus, for us, the turning point of our learning and transformation

came out of discomfort and tension, not familiarity. What is important to underscore is that insight and change occur when we “tune into” and embrace, rather than resist and reject, these moments of tension and discomfort. It is at these junctures that mindfulness – being aware of what the moment has to offer – finds its truest meaning and expression. A mindful state of being enables us to stay with the moment, rather than to turn away and become defensive, so that we can come through that moment with new thoughts and hopefully clarity.

We reiterate that people learn in different ways, influenced by their history, temperament and social positioning, which includes gender, race, age, status, and so forth. When we discussed what might unite the individual pieces of writing, we decided that the major common feature was our difference. If it were not for the course, we would not have found much common ground or experience that would draw us together as a group. However, as we reflected on the individual writing, we were struck by another similarity: the questioning of the self as the starting point of further reflection, learning, and transformation. The literature on critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy emphasizes collective and social change. We feel strongly, through our collective writing experience, that there is an intimate and necessary relationship between individual change and social change, that one cannot be privileged over the other; that indeed it is the dialectic between self-interrogation and collective change that leads to true and sustained social transformation. Without extending self-knowledge and self-reflection to the collectivity, we are encapsulated by the narrowness of our immediate world, insulated and unaware of how we are part and parcel of society. Without self-reflection and self-interrogation, we run the risk of reproducing conditioned patterns of behaviour and social arrangements that are the subject of our critique. Thus, self- and collective reflection and change go hand-in-hand, mutually informing and supporting each other.

The key to maintaining this dialectic is embodiment -- the final discovery we share with the reader. Ann began by sharing with us her struggle with this concept as a lived, rather than intellectual, reality. But she was not the only one. Although Roxana promotes embodied learning, she is frequently at a loss as to how to define it more precisely. In a presentation where she needed to communicate the concept to her audience, she suggested that embodiment “refers to the multiple and diverse ways in which people incorporate the materials covered in the course into their personal and professional lives” (Ng, 2003b, p.7). As we took up Ann’s question more seriously in our discussion, we began to flesh out and pinpoint what we mean by embodiment. In the context of our learning, we felt that embodiment is the process of becoming more aware – going from an intellectual understanding to an *awareness* of what occurs in social interactions, for instance. In the context of the course on equity, we became aware of power imbalance in social situations, and we carry that awareness with us when we reflect on our own interactions with others.

One reason that some of us have problem with the concept of embodiment has to do with the educational system itself. Throughout our educational history in contemporary times, we have been taught to equate the mind only with the intellect. Indeed, only intellectual understanding and cognitive learning are valued, rewarded, *and* treated as learning. In fact, learning involves not only our intellect, but also our emotion and body – in other words, our entire being. In the process of learning, we become excited or disinterested by waving our hands or turning away. Our eyes shine when something speaks to our experience, and our hearts sink

when what we say is ignored or eclipsed. Thus, learning is through and through a physical and emotional process. Feminist writings have emphasized experience, not just the intellect and rationality, as the basis for knowledge. We emphasize the physicality and emotionality of learning. It is when we recognize and value the totality of the learning process that we can begin to fully appreciate how we have been conditioned to see ourselves and others – be it our perception of our bodies or of groups seen to be “others”. As we apprehend and embody difference, not as a defect but as strength, we come closer to an integrative approach to addressing issues of equity in our society.

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