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Caricature and Hyperbole in Preservice Teacher Professional Development for Diversity

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Abstract

Professional development (PD) “for diversity” aims to prepare teachers to support students from varying backgrounds to succeed, often in under-resourced contexts. Although many teachers invite such inquiry as part of learning to teach, others resist “diversity” inquiry as extra to teaching, saying they cannot “do it all.” In this article, we discuss how preservice teachers at times *caricature* the requests of PD for diversity, hearing the task as a call to undertake superhuman tasks and to be people other than who they are. We argue that these caricatures require direct acknowledgment by both preservice teachers and teacher educators working in diverse contexts.

Keywords

teacher education, professional development, student diversity, cultural awareness, teacher attitudes, preservice teachers

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Preservice professional development (PD) that addresses issues of “diversity” asks teachers to think critically about how to support young people from varying backgrounds to succeed (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Although all PD asks teachers to consider how to support students better, most accounts of preservice PD for diversity—especially that which engages “race” issues, the focus of this inquiry—speak of a particularly polarized response. Some new teachers welcome the opportunity to explore teaching in diverse contexts as key to learning to teach in general; others fiercely resist the “diversity” or “race” aspect of the endeavor, calling such work extra, unnecessary, and imposed (Gay, 2005; Wiseman & Fox, 2010).

A typical explanation for pushback against race-related PD is that the inquiry required is politically or socially unsettling: Preservice teachers become frustrated when they are asked to examine deeply held beliefs, wear inequality-conscious lenses with which they might not agree, or critique their own life experiences as partial or (often) privileged (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). In this article, we offer an additional analysis of why teachers might push back against PD for diversity. We suggest that, as one reaction, teachers exaggerate the task of improving their teaching in diverse settings as a superhuman effort with impossible requirements.

Building on a 2-year analysis of a university course designed to prepare teachers to engage issues of difference and inequality, we show that course participants often *caricatured* the request to critically analyze and improve their own practice in diverse settings as a demand to do far more than a teacher should typically be asked to do. By caricature, we mean that participants distorted or used hyperbole to exaggerate a key message that the course texts or instructors tried to convey. We particularly saw this hyperbolic interpretation in course journals, where participants, mostly prospective teachers, railed against demands they framed as unrealistic at the core. We suggest that these participants actually pushed back against *phantom demands* not explicitly stated in the course materials but “heard” in course messages nonetheless.

To understand how participants arrived at these hyperbolic framings of course requests, we draw upon Bakhtin’s (1934–1935/1981) notion of dialogic language—language that contains different points of view that listeners can hear silently—as a theoretical frame. Bakhtin argues that all language enters into a world already laden with argument. Teachers taking race-related courses in American education enter from a social world that already divorces “diversity” work from “education” work, framing diversity work as extra to teaching (Irvine, 2003), and that often offers caricatured versions of “diverse” people, even in PD (Foley, 2008). Furthermore, these teachers were new to the profession and likely exhausted from full days of student teaching in high-poverty, resource-drained urban schools (see Milner, 2006) while

finishing university coursework in the evenings. Calling something “extra” also makes it heard as impossible: Exhausted teachers, finding such work too much, typically heard exaggerated demands for additional work that course instructors did not explicitly make.

Thus, we contend that while conducting PD for diversity, teacher educators may want to preemptively frame demands made of participants as *not* in fact outsized, nor extra to teaching. Otherwise, participants may hear arguments or messages in course material that relate to common framings of diversity, even if such claims and demands are not stated explicitly or intended. While we, as course instructors, intended participants to hear the message that teaching successfully in diverse settings was a possible and basic aspect of teaching, our participants sometimes seemingly heard the course as demanding from them a caricatured level and kind of action. Accordingly, they then pushed back against the very task of considering or addressing the diversity, race, or inequality aspects of their work.

We ask readers to consider caricature and pushback against caricature as a patterned dynamic to possibly expect, name, and address in PD for diversity, to help teachers normalize diversity-related inquiry and action (see also Pollock, 2010). We note that at the moments when teachers challenged caricatured expectations heard in the course, they often explicitly refused to further engage the issues at hand, thereby counteracting the core intent of such PD: to foster inquiry into improving practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). They also positioned teaching in diverse settings as overwhelming, fundamentally unappealing, or impossible. Indeed, the phantom demands were regularly heard as a demand to quit working in diverse settings, in particular, if one could not rise to the perceived occasion. By noting the risk of caricature or hyperbole in participants’ framings of “teaching for diversity,” course instructors could instead engage students in dialogue about sustainable professional effort to teach well in diverse contexts.

Literature Review

Like other aspects of PD in America today, high-quality PD “for diversity” (Hollins & Guzman, 2005) asks teachers to inquire seriously into improving practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Such PD typically requests that teachers learn about their students’ daily realities and experiences (or community experiences past and present) to try new ways of teaching subject matter, to offer supplemental supports to scaffold student success, and to explicitly support young people to feel valued and motivated (e.g., Banks, 2006; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 1997; Grant & Sleeter, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto & Bode, 2008, 2006; Zeichner, 1992; Zeichner et al., 1998). But

all PD, of course, asks teachers to learn more and undertake new action in these same arenas to serve their students effectively (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Nevertheless, teachers experiencing PD for diversity are often described as denouncing the inquiry requested (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Wiseman & Fox, 2010). The literature on resistance in both inservice and preservice PD for diversity offers some insight.

Much of the prior work on resistance considers the personal or political perspectives of White teachers who are asked to undertake particular new forms of learning. Preservice teachers without exposure to urban educational settings or classes about diversity might feel conflicted about teaching in urban schools; or, even if preservice teachers express an interest in teaching in urban settings, they might not see the importance of integrating antiracist pedagogy (Aragon, Culpepper, McKee, & Perkins, 2014). In general, teachers are assumed to lack knowledge of communities of color and consequently are asked to spend time gaining more knowledge to understand students' actual lives (Causey, 2000). Typically, in watching beginning educators learn this "new" material, researchers have identified teachers' new or emerging fear of unfamiliar communities and guilt about relative privilege as sources of teachers' refusal to engage with course content about diversity (see Gay & Howard, 2000; McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Tatum, 1992). Other research has argued that teachers refuse to engage in PD for diversity when new information prompts cognitive dissonance with their prior beliefs (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). Brown (2004), for instance, described how preservice teachers might use "deflective/reflective filters" to selectively accept only new information that fits prior values (p. 326). Teachers in PD for diversity also are asked to consider and address inequalities in students' opportunities to learn; LaDuke (2009) explained that teacher candidates might refuse to accept new requested roles as educational change agents.

Thus, existing literature suggests that preservice teachers may resist course content in PD for diversity as "extra" because it asks them to do a particular form of more that is personally unsettling. Existing literature also explores to some extent how such resistance manifests in participant behaviors, mainly silence or active resistance.

Although research has suggested various ideological reasons why educators might not want to undertake "more" work, less research has analyzed how and when in the course of PD teachers come to resist work to improve their teaching of diverse populations *as* more than teaching, period. Although prior research importantly discusses participants' reactions to PD for diversity, questions remain about what moments in the real-time experience of any course prompt these reactions. Thus, our research attempted to explore teachers' reactions at this finer grain of detail, by listening more closely to the

arguments of their reactions (Bakhtin, 1934-1935/1981). In doing so, we came to ask what aspects of the course experience might have caused teachers to hear *phantom* demands in PD experiences, demands to learn and do *even more* related to diversity and inequality or different things than they were actually being asked to learn and do. In this study, we particularly document how, at moments when teachers were asked to consider aspects of race-related diversity, teachers caricatured requests to think deeper about supporting students as impossible requests to be perfect, to sign onto ridiculously oversimplified new identities, and to jettison all content.

As we discuss in this article, participating preservice teachers reacted to the same three phantom demands heard over two iterations of a course on racial diversity and inequality in education. Each was a hyperbolic version of a seeming request to do something beyond reason:

1. The phantom demand to do and fix it all (perfectly and alone)
2. The phantom demand to stereotype groups
3. The phantom demand to do nothing else as a teacher but discuss race and racism

We discuss how these three reactions to perceived exaggerated demands surfaced repeatedly in the course over 2 academic years, both in real-time conversations and in reflective journal entries. Furthermore, while prior studies focus predominantly on White preservice teachers' reactions (Sleeter, 2001), we note how participants of various backgrounds often shared hyperbolic reactions to our course material over multiple years.

We want to clarify that to suggest teachers simply argued against course material would itself be a caricature of the teachers' real, multilayered positions. Although such hyperbolic reactions surfaced repeatedly throughout our data, often, teachers were grappling as well with far more nuanced arguments about course material and how to improve their work. Many also wrote throughout of positive experiences with the inquiry required by the course (see Pollock, Deckman, Mira, & Shalaby, 2010). A majority of course participants committed actively each year in their journals to being "antiracist educators," a phrase whose definition was debated throughout the course. Albeit on assignments to be graded, many explicitly welcomed the strategies discussed in the course texts and sessions as useful. Others spoke to experiencing watershed moments in their thinking about the topics addressed. As one participant concluded,

I'm sad the course is ending because I broke through some barrier against actually wanting to think deeply about the remaining stereotypes and gaps in

understanding that I have. I've spent a lot of this semester feeling frustrated: frustrated with myself, frustrated with conversations that felt like we were repeating the same half-excuses and half-best intentions without pushing each other. But I've moved, so maybe we have pushed each other to some extent. (Journal 20, 2008)

Yet the routine surfacing of negative reactions to caricatured versions of the course's seemingly unreasonable demands required our attention as analysts and practitioners, for these reactions suggested that somehow, teachers were hearing inquiry into teaching in diverse settings as demands to do something unwanted or impossible. Some teachers even heard our recommendations as a demand to work more at the expense of their very confidence, identities, content, and personal happiness. We want to think critically about what in our own materials or discourse may have prompted these hyperbolic reactions and how to mitigate them.

Method

Between 2006 and 2009, 10 doctoral students (including Bocala, Deckman, and Dickstein-Staub, who identify respectively as Asian/Pacific Islander, biracial [African American and White], and White women) and a White anthropologist/education professor (Pollock) joined together in a working group to analyze the real-time activity of Everyday Antiracism for Educators (EAR), a teacher education course designed to engage new educators in analyzing everyday issues of race, opportunity, and diversity in their work. The half-semester course was designed by the professor and required for all teacher candidates in our university's urban teacher education program during all years of research. It was open to other students at our university for the second year of the research presented here.

The course focused on engaging dilemmas of participants' everyday practice through conversation that examined (or countered) core ideas from the book *Everyday Antiracism* (Pollock, 2008) and related lectures that offered historical and contemporary context. The readings asked participants to critically engage suggestions such as integrating role models from the community into the classroom, deconstructing biological notions of race with students, and supporting students of color to meet high academic demands. The course also emphasized that "racism" was an everyday situation requiring collective remedy rather than a verdict on individuals' intentions, such that acts of "antiracism" could be taken by anyone to actively intervene against harmful, inequitable, or opportunity-denying situations. In the course, participants used a "number line" (see Figure 1) as a basic analytic device to

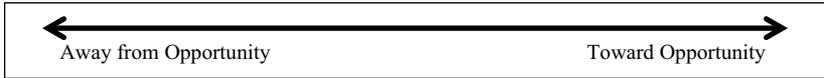


Figure 1. Opportunity number line.

Table 1. Participant Demographics by Race.

Year	2007 (n = 51)	2008 (n = 40 ^a)
White	57% (29)	75% (30)
Black/African American	14% (7)	8% (3)
Asian American	6% (3)	10% (4)
Latino/a	NA	3% (1)
Other	2% (1)	5% (2)
No race specified	22% (11)	NA

^aOnly specific information on the teacher education cohort is available.

support them in evaluating whether acts and situations “moved young people toward opportunity rather than away from it.”

The course was filled with participants studying to be teachers, principals, and also some guidance counselors, many in the midst of completing their supervised internship experiences at urban schools. In weekly journals and face-to-face meetings, participants were encouraged to reflect upon how the readings and discussions of the course intertwined with events and issues arising in their own practicum placements.

In the years analyzed here, all course participants were invited to allow our team to participate as researchers in small group discussions (with all data anonymized) and to participate in our working group’s ongoing research by making their course journals available anonymously. Of 51 participants enrolled in the course in spring 2007 and 53 in spring 2008, none refused researcher participation in small group discussions. Thirty-three in 2007 and 32 in 2008 chose to share their anonymized journals.

Although it is not entirely possible to distill the demographics of those who chose to share their course journals for research purposes—as consent was given anonymously—demographic information of those enrolled in the class mirrored those in teacher preparation broadly in the United States.¹ In both years, the class was comprised in the majority of White women with about one third of participants in both years identified as men. See Table 1 for specific racial demographics.

Data Collection

Our commitment was to capture and analyze the real-time reactions of course enrollees, by using participant observation that facilitated collection of “in-the-moment” data (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). As participant observers, we attended all course sessions and small group discussions, created jottings, turned our jottings into fieldnotes, and shared our fieldnotes during research meetings.

We also drew upon the journals authored by course enrollees that captured their ongoing written reactions as data; collectively, our research team read and coded 65 anonymous journals spanning 2 years of the course. The journals served to complement our participant observation reflections and provided deeper documentation of participants’ thoughts, reflections, and reactions to the course. While norms of verbal “race talk” meant that many participants remained “colormute” in public (Pollock, 2004), they often wrote privately and at length about their reactions to the course—and it was typically here, not in person, that they responded in frustration. For these reasons, we focus primarily on the journals in this article.

Our data enabled us to make claims about participants’ reactions to practices in the course and to specific suggestions or arguments made by the authors of the readings. Yet we cannot claim to know, in all cases, the specific class interactions or reading moments that prompted participants’ journal or in-class reactions, as their reactions to course activities were cumulative. In addition, while our data indicate some specific triggers that caused reactions during the course, it does not allow us to fully understand teachers’ complex ideas before or during the course experience. Thus, we attended in our analysis to the general issues, readings, or incidents teachers were reacting to during the course.

Throughout our study, we asked: What real-time reactions (realizations, new commitments, tensions, confusions, (dis)agreements) tended to occur in this version of diversity-related PD? Which interactions seemed most likely to derail or solidify the success of the PD? How might PD efforts best mitigate any interactive dynamics that seemed to reduce the PD’s effectiveness and pursue more productive interactions? Finally, what else did we need to learn about implementing PD for diversity in real time? We felt strongly that the interpersonal difficulty of studying one’s own course in real time was offset by the research benefit of being there both to experience and examine the ongoing conversations.

Data Analysis

We first conducted a grounded analysis (Charmaz, 2006) of the journals to uncover initial trends to serve as codes for a more focused, secondary

analysis. This section-by-section, and often line-by-line, coding process was iterative, as we met consistently to share and test emerging understandings, clarify our methods and assumptions, and identify key trends in participants' responses to the course material. We then returned to the journals to conduct a thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) exploring these trends in more detail. We continued to meet as we identified key portions of the journal entries that mapped onto one or all of the trends. Finally, we triangulated our findings from the journals with our fieldnotes from the course and small discussion groups. This process allowed for the appropriate validity checks (Richards, 2005), enabling us to revise our findings as needed.

We acknowledge the limitations of participants' self-reporting for assessing the full impact of PD. Indeed, research on PD for diversity shares no standard measure of teachers' preparation and growth (Hollins & Guzman, 2005), and much research uses teachers' ongoing reactions to the course as the sole measure of PD's effects and effectiveness. This study seemingly does not depart from that trend, but we are not attempting here to evaluate the course's effectiveness—rather, we are analyzing consequential patterns in teachers' reactions to it, as those reactions might affect how they will carry material forward (or not) in their practice.

Findings

We argue overall that the preservice teachers in the course reacted against seemingly impossible demands they heard in the course, even when the material explicitly made suggestions other than those heard. We describe each of these *phantom demands*—heard caricatures—in turn and explore how teacher educators might address these demands. Participants heard a caricatured demand to be perfect and act alone; a caricatured demand to oversimplify students' or communities' identities, as well as their own; and a caricatured suggestion that antiracist education was about constantly attending to race, racism, and racial flare-ups at the expense of subject-matter content.

Caricature 1: The Phantom Demand to Do and Fix It All (Perfectly and Alone)

In EAR, the course text and small group inquiry structure explicitly stressed that it was often unclear when teachers' actions could harm or help students despite good intentions; therefore, ongoing inquiry and pilot testing of potential solutions were required. Yet, despite this welcoming of trial and error, some participants still heard a demand that they, as individuals, were expected

to do everything “correctly,” causing many to worry that antiracism or teaching well in diverse settings meant flawless execution of right answers, often alone. Such demands for seeming perfection as isolated individuals became inherently overwhelming alongside the other demands of learning to teach. We address first, the anxiety about perfection and second, the anxiety about being perfect alone.

For example, one participant discussing the importance of learning “more and more” about “cultural backgrounds” expressed deep anxiety around a perceived expectation to not make even “a few mistakes” while learning:

I understand that it is important for a teacher to learn more and more about his or her students’ cultural practices and backgrounds. I understand that it’s important for teachers to treat students as individuals and not just members of specific racial groups. The problem I have is that it is nearly impossible to learn how students want you to treat them without making a few mistakes along the way. Are mistakes worth it—Can I recover from them if I make them? (Journal 1, 2007)

The course purposefully encouraged analysis of situations whose “right answer” was unclear—especially in its number line exercise, which invited ongoing debate on gray areas. But many participants still worried that “mistakes” were not allowed or “worth it.” While teachers explicitly learning to teach math or writing were acknowledging their roles as new learners, the diversity realm seemed to require “mistake”-free practice. Even as inquiry into all teaching strategy was core to a preservice program, teachers hearing caricatured demands to be “perfect” displaced a general anxiety about “right answers” onto the “cultural” and “racial” aspect of the task. At such moments of anticipating required perfection (with “mistakes” making “recovery” impossible), participants gave themselves a phantom version of diversity-related effort to argue against—and in the process, framed themselves as permanently inadequate to an impossible task. If inquiry into cultural practices and individual versus group experience was inherently mistake-laden and imperfect, teachers might never “recover.”

Notably, when difficult issues arose, some participants who heard a phantom demand to do things absolutely “right” chose safety and inaction instead. Journal 1’s author agonized about whether to “say something” or not say something in reaction to hurtful comments by others and worried that any comment about race issues “could be taken completely the wrong way”; thus, she decided “not to say anything at all” (Journal 1, 2007).

Thus, some participants experienced a request to inquire and debate as a demand for only “right answers.” Others heard a related aspect of this

phantom demand: to figure out solo the right thing to do. Even while the course structure stressed the need for group inquiry into the pros and cons of actions, some participants worried that they were totally alone in figuring out “right” ways of supporting students. These teachers heard a phantom demand to fix all racial inequality alone.

In actuality, the course’s core framework argued explicitly that collective action by teachers was essential. Not only did colleagues need each other to figure out how to improve student supports, but colleagues could not address inequality by themselves: The course stressed that each individual’s everyday acts piled up to consequences for students in concert with countless other individuals’ everyday acts. Still, when the course asked participants to consider and then take everyday action as individuals, some participants spoke back against a perceived, caricatured request to do everything not just correctly but alone, and many leveraged that hyperbole to argue that they just would not do anything right now.

For example, in a discussion of the potential of every teacher to confront pervasive race and ability myths, one participant spoke back particularly against a perceived hyperbolic request to “go in” and “take down” the entire racial tracking “structure” of her new school alone. She concluded that because such “single-handed” destruction might endanger her job—the ultimate consequential error—maybe nothing “could be done”:

What can be done about systematic structures that perpetuate the idea that race is linked to ability? As a new teacher I cannot single-handedly go into what will probably be a comprehensive high school and try to take down tracking. Even if I built a coalition of teachers, it is putting my job at stake when I do not have any legitimacy to begin with because I am a first year teacher. (Journal 26, 2008)

Again, hyperbole about potentially fatal errors in individual effort prompted resignation. This participant heard a seemingly ridiculous request to “take down” the school’s system “alone,” which was inherently something to reject.

Worries about caricatured requests for action could have teachers not just settling for inaction, but also judging themselves permanently inadequate. For example, teachers worrying about an inability to address “systematic structures” through isolated action also heard a phantom demand to individually *know* it “all”—to perfect themselves as individual repositories of all “culture” knowledge. That is, participants positioned additional inquiry into students’ lives or community experiences as requiring a personal accumulation of knowledge that was so vast that no one could ever measure up. A request to learn more in the diversity arena was heard as a request to learn everything.

For example, one student wrote a response to a chapter by Abu El-Haj (2008) about representations of Arab peoples in curriculum. Abu El-Haj herself argued that as certain peoples (here, Arabs) could either be misrepresented in curriculum or missing from curriculum, educators could review the representations that were and were not in the material they taught. The teacher found the request a call to remedy “all that I don’t know”:

Yes, we need to consider the issue of in/hypervisibility in terms of classroom texts and subject matter, and in terms of how we speak every day . . . I myself need to be better educated about Arabs, the Middle East, Islam, etc. The problem is that I could also stand to be better educated on the Renaissance, on modern poetry, on international politics, and the million other things that can and should come up in an English classroom. Realistically, I only have so much time in my life for independently educating myself, now as a grad student and soon as a teacher. I don’t mean to make excuses, but it’s daunting to think of all that I don’t know, and that not knowing can cause harm! We talked about a related subject in section today . . . it was around getting to know our students and their cultures—when is it enough? When are you no longer making gross assumptions? When have you “thought deeply”? (Journal 22, 2008)

Teachers hyperbolizing the ongoing quest to “think deeply” or “get to know students and their cultures” as requiring superhuman levels of individual knowledge concluded they “only had so much time in their lives” for the inquiry. Others considering the course’s request to think more about their pedagogy’s effects on diverse students pondered not how to keep learning more over time—the expressed goal of the course—but how to “possibly do it *all*” right now as individuals. This hyperbolic request was one to reject.

One student, for example, reacted to an essay that asked educators to consider using texts from youths’ lives (in this case, critical hip-hop) to engage students in content areas (Morrell, 2008). The student argued that Morrell’s suggestion felt like an impossible request forced on top of everything “pedagogical, behavioral, developmental.” The student then called all “antiracist” practice by extension too much to include “on top of it all”:

What really concerns me about these suggested considerations (and others from this class) is *how could I possibly do it all* [emphasis added], or even enough to really be effective? There are so many pedagogical, behavioral, developmental concerns that I don’t feel I have time to consider—how do I effectively include antiracist practice on top of it all[?] (Journal 22, 2007)

In this comment about “all” the work to be done (alone) was the repeated distinction we came to depict using a Venn diagram (see Figure 2 below): A

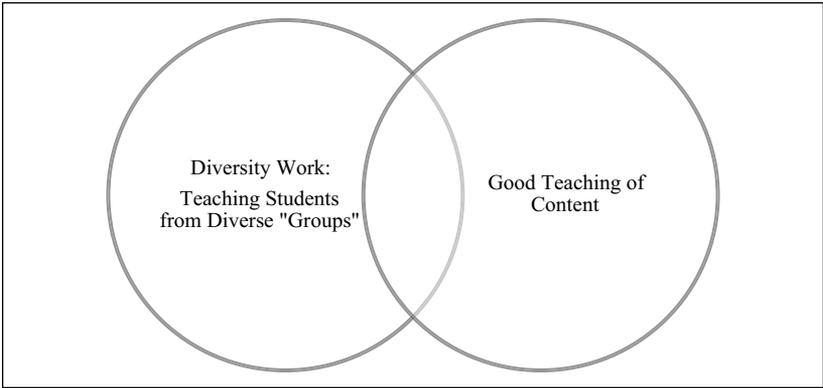


Figure 2. “Antiracism” as specifically distinct, extra work “on top of it all.”



Figure 3. “Antiracism” as part of good teaching.

teacher caricatured “antiracism” or diversity work specifically as distinct, extra work “on top of it all,” rather than simply inquiry basic to the work of teaching well (see Figure 3 above), an issue we return to in Caricature 2.² Positioning such work as “on top of it all” was related to calling it too much. That is, when teachers hyperbolized the course’s requested inquiry into issues of diversity and inequality as overwhelming and extra work beyond the routine “pedagogical, behavioral, developmental” aspects of teaching, they often made any version of such work seem extra. The suggestion from Morrell that prompted this reaction—to consider ways to interest youth through making

links to their lived experiences—could hardly be considered something “extra” to teaching. But in multiple years of the course, the essay’s suggestion to do so through investigation of hip-hop music triggered many teachers to caricature efforts to connect to students as *ridiculously* extra to addressing their students’ “pedagogical, behavioral, developmental” needs.

Morrell’s essay actually triggered many reactions in the years of the course—another being a vigorous refusal to stereotype student identity, as if the call of the essay was to stereotype students’ cultures rather than to inquire into them. In the next caricature to which we turn, teachers took various requests to get to know and connect to students’ lived experiences as a call to engage across fundamental, uncrossable gulfs of stereotyped difference. Our course expressly asked participants to keep inquiring into simultaneous differences and similarities in life experiences, often to emphasize human commonality. But some participants heard any inquiry into group difference in life experience as a demand to focus excessively on a hyper-simplified, stereotyped experience of group membership. When teachers heard a call to stereotype rather than a critique of stereotype, they argued that if teaching in diverse settings meant stereotyping “groups,” their students would be better served if they, as teachers, ignored group membership altogether.

Caricature 2: The Phantom Demand to Stereotype Groups

The EAR course explicitly held as one of its principles “refusing false or oversimplified notions of human difference,” one of the four overarching principles of antiracism from the EAR book; readings and class discussion continually asked teachers to resist stereotype and complicate identities. However, in many mentions of race identity, some participants still heard the course as encouraging stereotypical versions of who they and their students were. Some heard messages that positioned groups as so “different” that they, with a “wrong” identity, could not participate in the work.

Other research has shown that when race- or culture-oriented PD invites inquiry into difference and similarity, respondents can hear a request to accept oversimplified versions of difference. Teachers actually can be given oversimplified views of cultures in PD meant to engage diversity (Foley, 2008). But even when facilitators intend to engage debate on teacher–student identities and their relevance, some participants can still hear an argument that identities are fundamentally different and incompatible. For example, some White teachers come to feel “so white” during discussions of “whiteness” that work with students of color feels impossible, even when the intent of facilitators was to stress the possibility of such work (Luttrell, 2008). Research shows that teachers of color can come to feel “stuck” in

PD discussions when positioned through stereotype as perceived natural authorities on teaching students of their “group,” rather than as complex individuals who have complex identities and are also learning (Bell, 2008; Glazier, 2009).

In some cases, teachers experienced a request to inquire into students’ and teachers’ lived experiences as a caricatured request for “constantly” highlighting the “race” of a student as essentially “different” from oneself. For example, after reading the question, “In your practice, when does treating people as racial group members help them, and when does it harm them?” (Pollock, 2008, p. xviii) in the editor’s introduction to the course textbook, one participant weighed the hyperbolized choices of “ignoring race altogether” versus “constantly” “pointing it out.” This participant wrote,

I don’t want to *ignore* the fact that race plays into my students’ everyday lives . . . but I also don’t want to keep pointing out that they’re black if it’s going to make them get angry and shut down. (Journal 12, 2007)

Teachers thus refused a caricatured version of a heard request to hyper-emphasize a simplified student identity. Similarly, when asked to consider when and how, if at all, being White mattered in teaching, some White students heard the very question as an implication that they were “too different” from their students to teach them. Ironically, even when a reading on the “n-word” asked readers to consider whether at times White teachers problematically positioned themselves as “too different” from their students to wield their teacher authority (Luttrell, 2008), a participant heard the reading as indicating that as a “white male,” he did not have any “authority” to discuss his students’ ways of speaking:

We have had a lot of conversations in our classes about [students saying the n-word] and it’s tough because I, being a white male, do I really have the authority over students (outside of my classroom) to dictate what they use in greeting? (Journal 26, 2007)

It was not only White teachers who heard a hyperbolized or stereotyping emphasis on race identity; some teachers of color also heard any discussion of the experiences of students of color as positioning them stereotypically as “fundamentally different.” After reading Delpit’s (2008) essay, “Lessons From Teachers,” which made suggestions like “don’t teach less content, teach more” (p. 115), “ensure that all children receive access to ‘basic skills’” (p. 117), and “provide the emotional ego strength to challenge racist societal views of the competence and worthiness of the children and their families”

(p. 120), one participant wrote that Delpit was arguing that “African-Americans were a ‘different’ breed of human being” requiring particular strategies for effectiveness (Journal 25, 2008). With this caricatured version of Delpit’s claims in mind, the student—who referenced himself as a student of color and a low-income student at different moments in the course—called for rejecting all claims about group experience as relevant to teaching and learning. Expressing offense even at Delpit’s passing comment about a teacher who was successful with her African American students, he argued in response that a teacher should be able to teach “any student” well “regardless”:

One example of this is when she talked about how Ms. Brandon was an excellent teacher of African-American students. Shouldn’t an “excellent” teacher be able to teach any student, regardless of race or social class? I think so. (Journal 25, 2008)

Thus, some participants heard in class texts or discourse on race a hyperbolized call to forge teaching strategies only for specific, stereotyped types. They responded to that call either by reiterating stereotype or by outright rejecting race’s relevance.

Participants also heard caricatured arguments about teacher types: In each year of the course, some participants who did not consider themselves “white” heard an unarticulated message that White teachers were the only teachers of interest in the course. One international student participant called one essay’s discussion of “white teachers” an oversimplified call for “white” action only. Denouncing the reading “Recognizing the Likelihood of Reproducing Racism” by Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2008), she argued that the authors “explicitly state that their suggestions are ‘what WHITE teachers should do,’” and added,

In a course about antiracism, it felt like a slap in the face. As I have learned since I came to the USA, I am a person of colour. Thus, I am not white . . . meaning that what Bonilla-Silva and Embrick suggest *is not for me*. (Journal 12, 2008, emphasis added)

In their piece, Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2008) actually included teachers of color as potentially benefitting from the strategies they suggest, writing,

We offer a few specific suggestions for white antiracist educators joining the struggle against the racially unequal status quo, since they comprise the majority of the teaching force; several of these suggestions can be extended to teachers of color as well. (p. 335)

Also, “Teachers of color working within a racially unequal system can also unwittingly reproduce the racial status quo through their everyday acts” (p. 334).

Still, this participant’s reaction to the essay spoke back against a heard caricatured version of antiracism as for White teachers only. Such examples from journal entries began to suggest that teachers could hear such hyper-simplifications even when authors explicitly said otherwise. For example, a participant responding to Gándara’s (2008) chapter about the benefits and potential pitfalls of “cocooning” students voluntarily into temporary racial or ethnic affiliation groups to support discussion of possibly shared life experiences positioned Gándara hyperbolically as arguing against any “dialogue of what we share.” Gándara herself warned in the piece of overemphasizing in-group relationships and segregating students socially; nonetheless, this reader heard Gándara as arguing against students’ very “participation in society” (Journal 1, 2008).

Participants hearing in course material stereotyped or simplified emphasis on race identity’s importance rejected the material’s suggestions altogether. At times, participants denounced calls for inquiry as if they suggested simplistically that teachers of their “type” were not welcome in the profession or likely to be successful in the work. For example, another participant, responding to two readings proposing that teachers inquire with students into the various “cultural codes” that students encounter outside and inside of schools (see Carter, 2008; Delpit, 2008), expressed discomfort with a caricatured view on “white teachers” not expressed in either reading: “I guess I just feel a little frustrated because it seems to paint white teachers as a whole as being insensitive to non-white students” (Journal 31, 2008).

Thus, when participants heard the course’s inquiry as a hyperbolic demand to sign on to hyper-simplified and hyper-emphasized group identities—their own, or students’—participants often said in frustration that the readings were fundamentally misguided. Both roads led away from inquiry into complex racialized and individual experiences. In actuality, the entire EAR course invited teachers *both* to highlight individuality *and* to explore varying complex experiences as members of groups, explaining that this very dual frame was central to true antiracism. Still, some participants holding on to a more caricatured emphasis on identity difference dismissed complex struggles to get to know complex students as too simplistic to be worth undertaking at all.

A final “phantom demand” heard by teachers oversimplified the course’s guided inquiry into race issues in teaching as demanding that teachers now constantly address race, racism, and racial “flare-ups” in class, to the detriment of all content, pedagogy, and indeed, anything else in life.

Caricature 3: The Phantom Demand to Do Nothing Else as a Teacher but Discuss Race and Racism

We noted earlier the salience of the Venn diagram as participants progressed through the course, in which they artificially divorced the racialized aspects of teaching (complex identities, life experiences in opportunity contexts, experiences with common stereotypes, classroom relationships) from all other aspects of being a “good” teacher. The structural place of the course in the curriculum at the university was part of the issue: EAR was but one of many courses required in the teacher education program and one of the only required courses focused explicitly on diversity. Most participants simultaneously enrolled in courses on adolescent development, literacy, effective leadership, teaching methods, and subject area content that often did not position diversity or race as a main focus, while spending up to 5 days a week in practicum experiences at urban secondary schools. As such, they often expressed feeling exhausted by the time and consideration required to engage the “extra” diversity material of our course and simultaneously master other courses’ material.

In complaining about EAR’s “extra work,” however, they also spoke back against a caricature of the course’s requests, as if they were being asked to learn an unreasonable quantity of “extra” material and take on an exorbitant amount of work despite a lack of time. Some at times even argued that the course expected attention to “racism” to be incessant—and to eclipse all other aspects of “teaching” or even daily life.

Every year, for example, a number of participants experienced inquiry into the work of teaching in diverse classrooms as inquiry somehow designed to supplant (rather than supplement) growth in subject-matter expertise. Even while the course supported subject-matter teaching in diverse classrooms, one participant framed “bringing these ideas into [his] classroom” as a hyperbolic requirement to teach outside his subject area. The participant, a physics teacher, argued in direct opposition to this caricatured call to teach content “other than” physics:

Being science and math teachers, and maybe this seems like a cop out, I think that it can be very difficult to bring these ideas into my classroom. Especially with all of the standards for physics that [the state] has in place, it seems unrealistic for me to think that I can teach anything other than my subject matter. (Journal 1, 2007)

Every year, teachers reacted to some lessons that were explicitly “about race” as if they were calling for all lessons to be “about race” instead of about

content. While Morrell's (2008) essay referenced above called for incorporating students' everyday lives and interests into lessons generally, many caricatured this concrete lesson idea as a hyperbolized request to only teach students about rap music. Other essays were referenced as a hyperbolized call for doing nothing else in the classroom but explicit "race" lessons—as such, something inherently "extra" to teaching students generally.

For example, the Goodman (2008) essay in EAR, which contained the sole curricular suggestion of the book to teach a lesson about race and biology, caused some teachers to protest that they were being asked to make every class period a discussion on race and biology. Caricatured versions of what antiracism would look like in a science or math classroom particularly abounded in participant descriptions. Just as the participant above denounced antiracist practice as somehow separated from learning material more "pedagogical, behavioral, [or] developmental," another participant brought back Morrell's chapter by arguing that any attention to "race" meant rapping rather than learning chemistry or "standards":

Planning antiracist lessons is not going to work for me in my classroom. It does not come into the chemistry curriculum. I need to make sure the students learn what is in the state standards. That is my job. I am not going to analyze critical rap or have them write about their ethnicity. (Journal 2, 2007)

In actuality, the examples, essays, and articles the students read in EAR spoke of issues fundamental to all teaching, including in mathematics and science: bringing role models to the classroom who demonstrated the possibility of pursuing particular careers (Ong, 2008), engaging ideas about intelligence (Pollock, 2008), managing group work (Rubin, 2008), providing feedback on work (Cohen, 2008), and conveying high expectations common to any subject area (Ferguson, 2008; Taylor, 2008). Many class conversations explicitly defined emphasizing students' equal potential in all courses, including math and science, as antiracism. Yet in hyperbolizing antiracism or attention to diversity found in specific "lessons" as totally peripheral to their core work as educators, teachers again rejected a perceived demand to focus on race in *contrast* to content. Each year, various mathematics and science teachers—across race and gender backgrounds—most resoundingly voiced the caricature that antiracism was being forced on participants as some replacement not just for subject matter but also for curricular standards.

In caricaturing a perceived call to pay constant attention to diversity instead of teach standards-based "curriculum," participants at times framed attending to "race" issues in schools as equal to debating racial "flare-ups" in student relations, making it seem even more unreasonable to do such work

“all the time” or in lieu of “chemistry” and “standards.” One participant’s description was indicative of this hyperbolic notion that “racial” experiences in classrooms were experiences in which “tempers flared” and things got “out of control,” taking time away from instruction:

In our small group today we discussed “racial” issues that some of the [teacher] interns in our group are experiencing. One intern related a story of a class discussion that had gotten out of control when one Black student said he felt safer at our high school because there were fewer Black students there. . . . Tempers flared all around, the classroom climate lost structure, and the intern thought that people had left the classroom with hurt feelings. (Journal 23, 2007)

If “racial” work in teaching was equated to hyperbolic moments when “tempers flared,” teachers might see these moments of “hurt feelings” as the only time when “race” issues occurred in teaching. After listening to such tales of flare-ups in her section, this teacher then wrote that she “couldn’t think of anything meaningful to report from [her] own classroom” (Journal 23, 2007).

The course design did ask participants to share specific “dilemmas” from their teaching, possibly inviting perceived attention to fraught interactions rather than everyday work, even while material throughout the course engaged everyday questions of teaching to standards (e.g., Ferguson, 2008; Taylor, 2008; see also Deckman, 2010). Tools for supporting fraught discussions of race with colleagues were also part of the course toolkit, but the course never framed antiracism as equaling explicit race discussions during racial flare-ups. In the first years, the professor learned to say explicitly that talk in any classroom about any subject could work toward antiracism and equity by supporting student opportunity and success (Pollock, forthcoming). But without this counteracting of heard caricature, some teachers kept resisting a phantom demand to focus on antiracism through dialogue about race relations “every waking minute.” One participant explained that “the more race is spoken of in schools, the more stand-offish students and others become” (Journal 25, 2007) and argued, “While it is important to recognize one’s race and cultural differences, I do not think there should be an *extra forced effort to include race in everyday dialogue*” (emphasis added).

This hyperbolic framing of feeling “forced” to dialogue constantly about race was common. One student responded to an essay on “Debating Racially Charged Topics” by Haney-López (2008), which began by suggesting that “at one point or another” in a teacher’s career, one “will have to teach directly about race” (p. 242), by writing back against a caricatured version of

antiracism as “teach[ing] directly about race” in “each and every class” and “rais[ing] the issue in every class.” Notably, this educator also argued against the perceived call to replace the teaching of “content”:

I’m not sure that there is an authentic and organic way to raise the issue in every class—nor do I think it is necessarily productive. If the idea is to get these kids heading in the direction of more opportunity, not less—I think there needs to be a LOT of content taught. I think it’s important for the second conversations to occur—but they DO NOT need to occur in each and every class. (Journal 32, 2007)

While the course materials did suggest that teachers should consider rather than ignore a variety of societal race issues as they thought about intelligence, reacted to parents, broadcast their expectations of young people, taught with high expectations, and more, the course did not suggest that teachers should be talking about race in every class period to the exclusion of “content.” Yet each year, some participants spoke back against the perceived call to talk explicitly about race and racism incessantly, “each and every” moment, and to “confront” racism in “charged,” conflictual conversations “every single” day as tempers “flared.”³

As a final example of caricature, some participants heard a phantom request that they jettison their very happiness and lifestyle choices to teach well in diverse contexts. The course ended by pairing two final essays in the book: Bonilla-Silva and Embrick’s (2008) exhortations to educators to consider their own roles in reproducing racial inequality and Glass’s (2008) recommendations for “staying hopeful” by considering the everyday actions that contribute to improving the world. In response, a participant spoke back about the perceived requirement to “be *always completely committed* to anti-racism in *every waking moment*” (emphasis added) at the expense even of personal satisfaction. To this phantom demand, he shouted “no, no, no”:

I don’t know that I agree that one has to be always completely committed to antiracism in every waking moment of their lives. Actually, I think that is an awful thing to say, and that it leads to burn-out and frustration. Good for Mr. Glass to do so many different things all the damn time and not be burned out or discouraged. . . . However, I play music. I write songs that do not address issues of racism. If I wrote such a song, it would suck terribly. What if I want to spend time writing and performing music that I like, music that addresses and appeals to my middle class white sensibilities? By doing so, by dropping the antiracist ball for a minute, am I reproducing the system[?] This is not reasonable. I am mostly referring to the Embrick article, which also suggests that I should move out of [the] mostly white [neighborhood], where I have friends and a life, and

you know, move to [a predominantly African American neighborhood] or something. No. No. No. I am not moving. One cannot live every moment critically. Being “emotionally exhausted” is not a good thing to be! Everyone needs to take their eyes off the prize from time to time and just have a barbeque or something. (Journal 22, 2008)

This statement exemplifies the frustration that some participants voiced against phantom versions of what they heard as expected of them as teachers in diverse contexts: an existence without “music,” “friends,” and “barbeques,” even without “a life.” Shouting “no, no, no” against this caricature, the teacher demanded to put down the “antiracist ball.” Once again, by hyperbolizing the work of “confronting” racism and inequality, educators at times could not hear the actual advice of the course—to keep inquiring, with colleagues, into how one’s own everyday actions could support young people to succeed.

Discussion

We argue that preservice teachers caricaturing the requests of PD for diversity heard “phantoms” repeatedly critiquing their inadequacies and holding them to impossible standards. Yet in resisting caricatures, some teachers pushed back not just on the framing of the course but on core aspects of teaching in diverse settings—efforts to relate to students’ lives, to discuss needed improvements with colleagues, to consider one’s own identities as a teacher and person, or to teach “content” in engaging ways. In each example here, teachers pushing back against a phantom request heard in the course emphasized not only the difficulty of meeting the perceived challenge but also their own failures and inadequacies. While self-analysis and self-critique fits with the goals of PD, a version of oneself as inadequate in comparison with a caricatured version of expected action hardly leads to the heightened sense of teacher efficacy we know is essential to teaching well (see Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Yet teachers’ reactions to caricature became somewhat predictable: Key reactions appeared often in each year of the course. As Bakhtin (1934-1935/1981) wrote, “the word in language is half someone else’s” (p. 293). As course instructors, we could have anticipated specific scripted reactions (Pollock, forthcoming) and supported our participants to push beyond predictable caricature to more nuanced inquiry into the work of teaching in a diverse context.

In our work assisting educators to consider issues of racial inequality, we have been particularly concerned with clarifying real-time, predictable

tensions that arise during PD for diversity that demand explicit attention by facilitators and participants. We argue that these tensions require explicit and ongoing attention in large part because *not* engaging these tensions leaves educators refusing to engage or inquire, a stance that itself inhibits professional learning on the issues at hand (Pollock, 2010).

Here, we suggest that teacher educators might name predictable caricatures heard and felt in PD for diversity, and deliberately engage and counteract those caricatures even while communicating the work's importance. For example, teacher educators might note (a) that a focus on an individual's potential to act against harmful opportunity structures is not a request to be perfect or act alone, but a request to keep inquiring always with colleagues into how best to support students; (b) that some PD may suggest problematically that identities are simple or stereotyped, but any good PD rejects stereotypes in favor of nuanced analysis of group and individual experience; and (c) that while "antiracism" PD might be heard as suggesting constant dialogue on race, racism, and racial flare-ups in contrast to "content," true anti-racism in teaching is about pursuing student success in all of schooling. We also suggest that teacher educators might ask teachers about any demands they hear in their course that are making the work seem too overwhelming, too simplistic, or too "extra"—and ask why and what could be done so that teachers stay fueled for essential inquiry into how to be a successful teacher in a diverse setting.

For one, teacher educators might warn participants that inquiry into teaching well in a diverse setting requires, like all teaching, imperfection—engaging "gray area" situations where no move is always unarguably "right." Framing this effort using Dweck's (2000) growth-oriented—rather than fixed—approach to learning would help emphasize that learning to teach well anywhere is an ongoing, developmental process that improves with effort, and it is neither innate nor does it reach a state of perfection. Teacher educators might also note explicitly that confusion about "right moves" when dealing with race issues does not indicate a fundamental lack of capacity but is simply part of the ongoing struggle to figure out how to teach better in all arenas. Teacher educators can also point out that a learning stance is essential to all teacher development, and ask why learning on race issues should be any exception; relatedly, teacher educators also can reiterate that no shame should result from any committed effort to learn (Pollock, forthcoming). Teacher educators can also state that all teaching requires an effort to fill specific knowledge gaps to teach more successfully, and they could emphasize that even while individual action is crucial in the teaching profession, nobody can solve inequality "alone"—and nobody is expected to.

Next, teacher educators can acknowledge that inquiry into human difference and similarity can ironically leave people oversimplifying or stereotyping difference. Thus, they might ask teachers the following questions: Is anyone feeling stuck in some oversimplified version of identity? Have we sufficiently emphasized that diversity work or “antiracism” requires forging toward more nuanced views of ourselves and others? By engaging teachers in a nuanced discussion about how identities develop as we participate in intersecting and multiple communities (Nieto & Bode, 2008), teacher educators can break down the simplified notion that any person embodies one type, one “culture,” or one category of experience. If teachers express that they find portrayals of people or groups oversimplified, purposefully taking the time to collectively explore life experiences and present more complex visions of communities can be a valuable exercise (Pollock, forthcoming). When participants make predictable arguments about the total irrelevance of race, perhaps in anxious response to course materials, teacher educators also can reiterate that nuanced race analysis actually grapples with any oversimplified understandings, and they can urge students to question polarized stances on race’s irrelevance as well.

Finally, teacher educators might explicitly question how even veteran teachers come to argue that engaging diversity or opportunity systems where they teach is extra to teaching “content.” In this course, we have learned to raise directly the typical divorce of “diversity” issues from “teaching” and questioned with students what teaching well in a diverse society requires. Noting typical hyperbole, teacher educators might also say directly that successful teaching in diverse settings does not mean “talking about race” at every second of every day, jumping constantly into the fires of racial conflict, or rejecting “content” or even personal satisfaction, but rather working toward fulfilling the full potential of young people—and so, talking explicitly about race (or any subject) whenever something stands in that goal’s way.

Overall, teacher educators also might consider whether teachers are perhaps transferring other sources of exhaustion or frustration onto the requests of PD for diversity particularly, perhaps because such PD broaches the challenge of building relationships in classrooms and the deep realities of resource drain and racial segregation that characterize schools today. Throughout these data, we saw new teachers blaming classic novice anxieties about doing things “right” on the task of having to decide *antiracist* acts; they worried not about the challenges associated with the general isolation of teaching (Little, 1990) but about the project of tackling *race* inequality by themselves (Caricature 1). They blamed the ongoing struggle to improve student–teacher relationships (Yonezawa, McClure, & Jones, 2012) on the race aspects of those relationships (Caricature 2). Last, they blamed the overall strain of novice (and under-resourced) teaching of content on not having enough time in

the day to engage race and diversity (Caricature 3). Noting such transference, we might discuss with teachers how the systemic under-resourcing of schools, neighborhoods, and families, not students' "diversity," forces teachers into exhausting challenges related to meeting students' needs.

Conclusion

This study builds upon the previous literature on preservice teacher resistance to courses about multiculturalism or diversity by providing an additional framework for understanding what teachers might be "hearing" in the course content. By examining the outsized, caricatured messages teachers apparently heard and then, how their reactions to such caricatures limited their own inquiry and action, we move away from simply assuming that (particularly white) preservice teachers might be just developmentally unready or unwilling to engage in improving their teaching of diverse students. Instead, we explore how teachers of all backgrounds may come to resist the "diversity" aspect of preservice education when they exaggerate the requests being made of them. Such an analysis locates the impetus for change in the course instructors, who can then take steps to name predictable caricatures as such. Even while framing the quest to teach successfully in diverse settings as both urgent and essential, instructors can ask teachers whether they hear *hyperbolized* requests for their own self-improvement. Thus, we propose that rather than ignore or dismiss teachers' frustrations with PD for diversity or adjust courses unthinkingly to avoid frustration, teacher educators should engage these frustrations directly with teachers—and specifically ask whether the caricatured version being argued against is in fact real or a phantom version of the ongoing task of teaching.

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Notes

1. Due to limited access to records, we have incomplete demographics for participants in the Everyday Antiracism for Educators (EAR) course who were not enrolled in our school's teacher education program.

2. The authors and EAR graduate students developed the Venn diagram concept over multiple years of collaboration. Special thanks to Jenny Jacobs, Nicole Simon, and Anita Wadhwa for their input.
3. This same pattern replicated at the highest levels of response to the book: When the book *Everyday Antiracism* first came out, a reporter for *Education Week* was told to find a “colorblind” opinion to “counter” the book’s apparent call for “more” “race-consciousness.” Roger Clegg, head of the “Center for Equal Opportunity” was asked to comment on *Everyday Antiracism* even though by his admission in the story, he had not read the book. Clegg “heard” the book’s argument without reading it and called in response for more “colorblindness,” arguing that “I’m skeptical that race has to be at the forefront of educators’ minds in every aspect of school business” (Viadero, 2008, emphasis added).

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