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“Maybe Tightening the Collar is the Way to Do It”
Naturalizing Oppression in Teacher Discourse on Student Learning

Hope Kitts

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Naturalizing Oppression in Teacher Discourse on Student Learning

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Abstract

As part of a larger study, through this research I examined the ideological foundations of public school teachers' interpretations of Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. I discovered that White teachers in this study talked about oppression in ways that implied it was a natural part of life, and even in some cases necessary for learning. Here I ask: What does teachers' acceptance and naturalization of oppression mean for student learning and educational outcomes more broadly? Using a Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) framework I use ideological critique to present and critically examine metaphors of violence and control as voiced by two participants in the study, Janet and Pam. Further, I show how the one participant of color in the study challenged his colleagues' assumptions about human nature and individuality, which Janet and Pam used to rationalize oppression. These findings have implications for teacher education and teacher professional development insofar as I urge teacher educators to examine how teachers think and talk about oppression and their role in sustaining or challenging the status quo through their teaching.

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Because of an unpaid education debt, educational outcomes for students from historically marginalized groups in the United States are abysmal. Postsecondary undergraduate enrollment is four times greater for White students than for Black students and about three times greater for White students compared with Hispanic students (NCES, 2020). Students of color consistently underperform compared with White students in reading and math (Howard, 2020, NCES, 2020). Multiple analyses reveal that public schools are still largely segregated by race, and receive disproportionate funding despite serving the same number of students (EdBuild, 2019; National Education Policy Center, 2023). Equally disturbing, 80% of public school teachers today are White (NCES, 2020). While disparities in educational outcomes are the result of numerous factors related to policy, resource distribution, gerrymandered school districts, Eurocentric curriculum and generations of school disenfranchisement to name a few, the overwhelming presence of White teachers teaching students of color deserves continued examination (Jupp, Berry & Lensmire, 2016; McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 2001). Through this study I wanted to understand how White teachers talk about their students, with the assumption that how they talk about teaching and learning reveals underlying dominant ideology in relation to how they think about their roles, their teaching and their students.

Beyond examining the numerical disproportion of White teachers to students-of-color, I wanted to understand how dominant ideologies may influence the way teachers (who are predominantly White) approach teaching their students (who are predominantly of-color). To understand how White teachers in my study conceived of teaching, I used a Critical Discourse Studies framework to examine how these White teachers talked about teaching and learning. From this perspective the ways that language is used can reveal conscious and unconscious relationships to power, which translate into real effects in the contexts of schooling. I intended this study to draw attention to the ways in which teachers' discourse communicates and reinforces dominant ideologies at the level of the institution of schooling, so that schooling (and teachers within it) might resist the colonial project that has been its legacy.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Discourse Studies

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) has emerged as a popular approach in the social sciences in the last twenty-five years. Contemporary scholars have argued for the word *studies* instead of *analysis* to convey the intra/transdisciplinary, anti-positivist nature of the methodology (van Dijk, 1998). Thus, I use Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), to convey these emergent meanings. CDS springs out of critical linguistics (CL) (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Madrid, Otto, Shuart-Fans & Smith, 2008) and takes context and the examination of relations of dominance at the institutional level as foundational (Wodak, 2001).

CDS focuses on issues of power and ideology (conscious and unconscious) embedded in language (Kress, 2011, van Dijk, 2001; Wodak, 2001). Scholars taking the CDS approach examine how power manifests at the level of language (Fairclough, 2010; Rogers, 2011; van Dijk, 1987), which makes it a suitable approach for this research insofar as I show how relations of power manifested ideologically through teachers' verbal interactions and written responses.

As Fairclough (2001) writes: "Ideologies are closely linked to language, because using language is the commonest form of social behavior, and the form of social behavior where we rely most on commonsense assumptions...Ideology is pervasively present in language" (p. 2). We shroud ideological commitments in language to the point that we are often not consciously aware

of them (Althusser, 2014). Studying language in use (in this case speech) reveals relationships of power and dominance at multiple levels—from the smallest interaction at a micro level to macro levels related to institutional and government entities. Again, Fairclough (2010) writes, "For critical discourse analysis...the question of how discourse cumulatively contributes to the reproduction of macro structures is at the heart of the explanatory endeavor" (45). Halliday (1978) proposes that "by their everyday acts of meaning, people act out the social structure, affirming their own statuses and roles, and establishing and transmitting the shared systems of value and of knowledge" (p. 2). Illuminating social relations of power as revealed through critical analysis of language works to understand how entities shape individuals, but also how individuals shape institutional entities. Language, from this perspective, shapes and is shaped by individuals and abstracted institutional formations in relationship. To put it succinctly: "Discourse makes people, as well as people make discourse" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 41).

Scholarship on how teacher-talk influences classroom interaction and student learning is well-established, yet so far missing examination of violence in language (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2014; Cazden, 1988; Mercer & Dawes, 2014). In addition to the ways that teachers talk in classrooms, scholars theorize how teachers talk about students in absentia, and what this talk reveals about teacher beliefs (Delpit, 2006; Diamond, Randolph & Spillane, 2004; Haan & Wissink, 2013; Horn, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Oakes Wells, Jones & Datnow, 1997; Rubin, 2008) and expectations (Bomer, Dworin, May & Semingson, 2008; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007; Valencia, 1997). Alvidrez & Weinstein (1999) found that students from low-income families were talked about as having fewer academic and social capacities. Egregious as this is, these patterns are made more so when research on expectations and the self-fulfilling prophecy are taken into account (Rist, 1970; Ferguson, 2003). The way that teachers think about students—made explicit through their spoken discourse—can have tangible effects on students' perceptions of themselves, which in turn, may impact their academic success. As Morris (2023) states, "previous research confirms that what we believe and what we feel responsible for influences our behavior; for teachers, their behavior determines the outcomes they produce with students (Alford & Woods, 2017; Halvorsen, Lee & Andrade, 2009; Kumar & Hamer, 2012; Vartuli, 2005)" (p. 92).

Datnow, Choi, Park and John (2018) found that educational policies related to the examination of student data can also influence how teachers talk about students and the justifications and inferences they make regarding students' achievement, ability and home lives. Studying practicing educators who were also graduate students enrolled in an educational leadership program, Pollack (2013) found that this racially diverse group of educators constructed deficit narratives of students of color that fit narratives of "telling it like it is," "placing blame outside of educators' spheres of influence" and "depicting the 'other'" (p. 871). These discursive constructions served in part to abdicate responsibility, entertain and create social distance (Pollack, 2013, p. 871). Ferguson (2003) posited that teachers' stereotyping of students in the room contributes the persistence of the so-called achievement gap between Black and White students. To this body of literature I add consideration of what violent metaphors of students, teaching and learning mean for teacher beliefs, ideologies and ultimately students' experiences in classrooms where teachers characterize their work with students as violence. While this data is too narrow to generalize, it does point in future directions, begging the questions: To what extent are metaphors of violence given voice in White teachers' discourse about their students and the learning process? And, what does it mean for students when their teachers conceive of their work as akin to violence?

Context of the Study

The site for the larger study was a district, public high school in a large city in the southwestern region of the United States. For purposes of anonymity of teachers, staff and students, I will call this school Ridgeview High School (RHS). RHS is a public, secondary school located in a state with the third-highest poverty rating in the United States at 18.2%. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the median household income in the state was $49,754. Considering multiple factors related to education, healthcare and the economy among other factors the state ranked 48th out of 50 overall, with education ranked 50th (U.S. News, 2021). During the 2018-2019 school year, RHS ranked among the bottom 50% for all schools in the state.

RHS is situated on a vast campus, and its district extends over a large geographic area. According to the district website, the district itself includes more than 84,000 students, 142 schools and 12,000 full-time employees. In 2017, this large metropolitan district was re-organized into four school zones with approximately 22,000 students, 35-40 schools and each with an associate superintendent (district website).[7]

According to the American Community Survey (U.S. Census, 2017), the zip code in which the school is located comprised 37,438 people, for which the median age was 35.9 years. Within this area 32% identified as White, 4% identified as Black or African American, 7% identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native and 1% identified as Asian, including Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese. Fifty-two percent of people in the area identify with Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race), including 35.5% as Mexican, .5% Puerto Rican, 1.8% Cuban and 14.2% other Hispanic or Latino.

The American Community Survey (U.S. Census, 2017) shows 50% of residents ages 5-17 speak a language other than English, 41% of those people reporting Spanish as their first or second language. The same survey reveals the median household income for the area was $30,195, with 51% of children below the poverty line, and an unemployment rate of 8.9% for people over 16 years old. 8.2 percent of residents at the time were veterans, largely of the Vietnam and Gulf wars. Eighty-one percent of residents in the area had a high-school diploma or higher educational attainment.

The area had more renters than owners, with little new housing development—a reality exacerbated by supply shortages resulting from the effects of the Covid pandemic. Housing statistics for the area from the American Community Survey (U.S. Census, 2017) show that of 19,150 units, 33% of homes were owner-occupied, while 67% of housing were occupied by renters. Of both homes and rentals, 13% remained unoccupied. Forty-two percent of renter-occupied housing units were built from 1960-1979, while 68% of owner-occupied homes were built from 1940-1959. In the area, 26.3% of renter-occupied households had no vehicle available.

The data suggest that students attending RHS live in an ethnically heterogenous, multilingual neighborhood with a median household income of about half the state's average. Given the high poverty ranking of the state, the data show RHS students live and go to school in one of the poorest regions of the United States. These students cope with high rates of neighborhood crime and economic instability, conditions which, according to critical pedagogy, can be centered in the classroom to lead students to inquire into the political and historical antecedents which created and function to sustain these conditions.

Positionality

I worked at the school site as a University embedded faculty member for three years prior to the study. Before that, I was a high school teacher for eight years in New York and New Mexico. In my role as embedded faculty I supervised student teachers at the school and also provided professional development on teacher residencies with their mentor teachers. Prior to the study, I worked in this capacity with four of the seven participants. Coming from a university context which created some distance between us, our prior history may have made participants more comfortable and positioned me as a semi-insider, with overlapping social identities as White teachers.

The extent to which sharing a White identity positioned me as an insider is debatable, for as Alcalde (2007) shows the insider-outsider binary is oversimplified, and sharing one social identity is often not enough to claim insider status. Other social identities, such as those related to social class, education, gender, and sexuality among others can create distance between participants. Our aligned identities as White, however, positioned us as members of the same raced group, regardless of our personal understandings and feelings about race. As such, participants likely viewed me as an insider or semi-insider, making it probable that they assumed I shared in-group values. The result was that more was shared with me as an insider, and yet it was shared almost more covertly, as if what was being said did not need to be stated explicitly. Insider status, as Chavez (2008) details has benefits and disadvantages—while access and rapport are simplified, the unspoken and unseen lurk behind data collection and interpretation. This made the task of ideological critique doubly challenging insofar as I had to uncover the assumptions participants left unsaid as a result of speaking with an in-group member, as well as account for my own unconscious ideologies as a White person. This almost guaranteed that I did not see everything in the data.

My positionality as a White researcher is not insignificant, but rather rife with meaning especially in the context of engaging with participants who are also White. As Foste (2020) states, "White scholars have an obligation to operate with caution and attend to the various ways in which whiteness functions within the research process" (p. 143). Like Foste (2020) I questioned if my shared white identity enabled a kind of "backstage racism" (Picca & Feagin, 2007) where participants may have felt more comfortable sharing damaging assumptions with me. Throughout the research process I asked myself if I should intervene in the violent metaphors teachers constructed, or remain silent so as not to compromise rapport and the collection of authentic data. My concern became that if I took a contradictory position on their language they may be less inclined to speak freely, which was the purpose of the research. After agonizing about this unanticipated dilemma I sided with Foste (2020) who makes a distinction between how ethical obligations as a White researcher with White participants are different from obligations as a White antiracist in everyday talk and interaction. I made the choice in this research to not intervene in participants' damaging talk in order to gather examples of this talk and bring it to light for future work in teacher education and critical teacher professional development.

Methodology

Data Collection

This study was approved by a university Institutional Review Board (IRB). There were no sources of funding and no conflicts of interests. The names of the school sites as well as the participants are pseudonyms. I openly recruited to teaching faculty at the first faculty meeting of the 2020-2021 school year. I did not exclude any teacher at the school site who wished to participate. In this way, participation in the study was open to any certified, practicing schoolteacher at the chosen school site, regardless of their content area, years of experience, their social, cultural, religious or racial background, and without consideration for their previous exposure to critical pedagogy, or their prior opinions about critical pedagogy. Seven teachers completed the study. While all teachers were presented with the opportunity to participate in the study, a majority of participants who completed the study (85%)—much like the larger teaching force—identified as White or Anglo.

To gather responses to this text and triangulate the data, I organized three study group discussion sessions, two interviews with each participant, reflective writing and member checking with teachers at Ridgeview High School (RHS). Each study group was 90 minutes, and interviews before and after group sessions lasted approximately one hour. To help me make sense of the data I collected observational jottings and research memos. All meetings were held virtually, due to the duration of the study from August 2020-December 2020, during the school closures the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated.

Group discussions and interviews were conducted via the internet platform Zoom. All sessions were recorded by Zoom, then imported into the transcription software HappyScribe and checked for accuracy. Both accounts (Zoom and HappyScribe) were personal accounts, and I was the only person with access to these records. Recordings were not uploaded to the Cloud, and therefore not licensed as shareable by Zoom, but were rather saved on the hard drive of my personal computer, which—like all of us during this time—was kept at home.

I asked participants to jot down their thoughts after group sessions. This helped me to capture their personal impressions immediately. At the end of the study I arranged to pick up participants' writing. In addition to collecting discourse through study groups, interviews and reflective writing, I used member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000), jottings and research memos as secondary data sources to strengthen triangulation.

Analytic Framework: Ideological Critique

The concept of ideology emerged historically from conditions of social transformation and political struggle, with Destut de Tracy's, "science of ideas" in early 18th century revolutionary France. Originally a critique of social ideas, the concept of ideology after de Tracy experienced an inversion, coming to mean the very body of social ideas themselves (Eagleton, 1991). In addition to this inversion, ideology has since taken on and maintained plural meanings with varying degrees of criticality. By 'criticality' I mean the extent to which something questions dominant relations of power (Kitts & Peele-Eady, 2019). For the purpose of this study, I use ideology in its current, rather than original intended meaning, that is, as social ideas with explicit or implicit political motivations (Eagleton, 1991).

In light of the many variations on the study of ideology Eagleton (1991) credits Thompson (1985) as “the single most widely accepted” one (Eagleton, 1991, p. 4). That is, “to study ideology…is to study the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination” (Thompson, 1985, p. 4). In this study I focused on how the meaning teachers made of Freire’s (2018) text functioned to position and portray students and characterize their work as teachers.

Ideological critique is part of CDS insofar as CDS examines how institutional power operates through communication at the unconscious level (Fairclough, 2015). I adapt Thompson’s (1990) depth-hermeneutic approach, which he argues, “can readily be adapted to the analysis of ideology” (p. 273). This framework helped me to locate general ideological discursive constructions in the text, but it was not sufficient for helping me to go deeper into the discursive moves, how they functioned and for whom. While I was able to locate dominant ideologies within the text, the framework did not illuminate the assumptions speakers were making in naturalizing ideologies. Discovering that a participant was legitimizing a relationship, for example, was superficial until I further analyzed their discourse to excavate what they were taking for granted, or comparing, or how their legitimation functioned in relation to their self-presentation. For this reason I then deconstructed these data samples using two tools central to CDS: facework (Bloor & Bloor, 2007; Goffman, 1959) and “the unsaid,” or where “ideologies are primarily located” as assumption, implicature and omission (Fairclough, 2010, p. 27).

Data Analysis

To make sense of the data, I completed several rounds of open, inductive coding followed by two stages of deductive coding. In the first stage of deductive coding I used Thompson’s (1990) general modes of ideology and their associated symbolic constructions to locate ideologies across interviews, focus groups and writing samples (Table 2). After discovering where dominant ideological constructions in discourse manifested, I coded these segments of data a second time for instances of facework (Bloor & Bloor, 2007; Goffman, 1957) and the unsaid (as assumption, omission and implicature) (Fairclough, 2010), two tools specific to analysis in the tradition of Critical Discourse Studies. I sorted the codes by frequency, establishing the most frequent codes as prominent themes and established relationships among all the subsequent codes.

In this way, I employed both inductive and deductive coding schemes (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 85). In this stage, I applied codes related to the symbolic strategies and associated ideological modes Thompson (1990) identifies. Using the analytic software Dedoose (https://www.dedoose.com/), I cross-analyzed the ideological codes with the most frequent codes discovered through open coding. This cross check enabled me to see where ideological modes presented in relation to the research questions. I then interpreted these segments of the data with facework and the unsaid in mind.

Table 1
Modes of Ideology and Their Symbolic Constructions (Thompson, 1990, p. 60)

General modes	*Some typical strategies of symbolic construction*
Legitimation	Rationalization Universalization Narrativization
Dissimulation	Displacement Euphemization Trope (e.g. synecdoche, metonymy, metaphor)
Unification	Standardization Symbolization of unity
Fragmentation	Differentiation Expurgation of the other
Reification	Naturalization Eternalization Nominalization/Passivization

Results and Discussion

In interviews, study groups and reflective writing, some White teachers described oppression as a natural part of life, and at times something instructive and beneficial. If teachers in this study viewed oppression in society at large as well as within their classrooms as natural, how (I wondered) was their teaching and their students' learning affected by this stance? Moreover, how can schools be transformed for the benefit of students if White teachers take oppression to be foundational, even necessary to learning?

In our last study group session I asked the group what they thought of Freire's last chapter (2018). In response, Pam and Janet both naturalized oppression, and consequently their own power to oppress as teachers, which Joaquin directly and succinctly challenged.

1 **Pam:** Is he [Freire] thinking there's a possibility that we will end up changing human nature and maybe to
2 become truly altruistic...You know, it's our human nature to be this way. And human nature won't allow
3 for socialism to work because, you know, individuality.
4 **Janet:** The goal was this idea of humanization, right? So that's huge. That's profound. And he [Freire]
5 felt there was so much power in that. Along with his idea of action, I found it to be naïve, if you will,
6 beautiful, but naïve. I don't think he really took into account in very many ways, human nature. It kind of

7 reminded me of how beautiful socialism and communism can sound and the theory is always lovely. You
8 know, we have all this in common and we help one another out, but it fails every time. Why? Because of
9 human nature. So although I appreciated what he was saying about dialogue, I also thought to myself,
10 you know, it's human nature for certain people to assume leadership positions, it is human nature. And
11 although his oppressed people that he was always referring to and the oppressors, right, we're supposed
12 to, the leaders of the oppressed, we're supposed to really come together and advocate together, right? The
13 oppressed, need to name their words and pretty much just name the world, right? Which sounds lovely.
14 It does.
15 **Joaquín**: I think we're dealing with something a little different when we're talking about human nature,
16 because we're looking at human nature from our individualistic society and our individualistic culture. If
17 you're looking at human nature from a collectivist culture, Chinese, Japanese, some African cultures,
18 some Native cultures, you don't have to change human nature. It's already built in. There are cultures
19 where the group has precedent over the individual.
20 **Pam:** So it's not human nature, OK.
21 **Joaquín:** It's our cultural nature, and we live in an individualistic culture, so it's our cultural nature to be
22 individualistic, not our human nature.
23 **Pam:** But aren't they working together in their culture to help each other because it benefits them?
24 **Joaquín**: Well, that's the other part of that. But at the same time, right, because that's the big thing. I help
25 that person because when I help that person, it helps me. It's that acceptance rather than, every man for
26 himself and the rest of you are on your own

Pam's response painted broad strokes of human nature as essential, unchangeable and uniform, and contrasted it in a binary opposition to altruism (1-3). Her positioning of human nature in opposition to altruism, and individuality as opposed to socialism communicated her assumption that to oppress others and put the self above all else is uniquely human. In our second interview Pam similarly stated, "Isn't someone always going to be oppressed? Otherwise there's no society" (Interview 2, December 16th 2020). Janet supported Pam's characterization of human nature as inherently oppressive and competitive, and characterized Freire's goals of humanization as naïve (5-6). Her use of the phrase "leadership positions" (11) and "leaders of the oppressed" (12-13) as a stand-in for oppressor naturalized and essentialized oppression as positive and requisite to organization, while simultaneously positioning the oppressor at the center of action, which the oppressed receive.

While his White colleagues naturalized the primacy of individuality, Joaquín relativized it as a cultural artifact. Joaquín phrased his counterargument first by hedging with the phrases "I think" and "a little," (16-17) the effect of which qualified his statement as limited to his thoughts and minimized the difference to which he was drawing attention. This was an example of Joaquín assuming the role of diplomatic resister. Along with discursive hedging, Joaquín used the inclusive pronouns "we" and "our" (16-17). His use of the pronoun "we" in "we're dealing" (16), "we're talking" (16) and "we're looking" (17) aligned himself with the previous speakers in the sense that

they were looking, dealing and talking about the same thing together from the same western cultural worldview. Joaquín shifted pronouns, however, when shifting worldviews when he said, "If you're looking at human nature from a collectivist culture" (18) and "you don't have to change human nature" (19). The function of this deft pronoun usage was to challenge one Discourse with another without having to occupy the subject position of the challenging Discourse. Discursively, Joaquín presented another worldview from within and alongside that of his colleagues.

When Joaquín challenged an individualist Discourse with a collectivist Discourse, Pam questioned whether a collective spirit is truly collective to the exclusion of the individual (24-25). Joaquín highlighted her contradiction in bringing together the individual with the collective, rather than setting them in opposition, "When I help that person, it helps me" (27). While Pam's definition of altruism implied there could be no individual benefit, Joaquín's challenge uncovered the ways that the individual and the collective are connected, an assumption that challenged foundational American ideals of rugged individualism and personal isolation characteristic of industrial society.

The need to explain away oppression persisted after critical interactions, as when Pam in the final interview read one of her journal entries which stated: "I do not see the world as he [Joaquin] does. I can understand his need to free oppressed individuals. But doesn't everybody experience oppression in one form or another? Wealth and genius IQ are just as oppressive as poverty" (Final interview, December 15th 2020). Similarly, Janet in our third group discussion said:

29 **Janet:** By his [Freire's] definition of being oppressed, just the realization that we as Americans are
30 incredibly oppressed. We have our own examples of that oppression...As long as we have Republicans
31 and Democrats and we are polarized and blame each other, those in power get to say, well, if it wasn't for
32 those Dems or if it wasn't for those Republicans. (Group discussion 3, December 11th 2020)

In these examples, freedom from oppression seemed to be a life without struggle of any kind internal or external, rather than a life characterized simply by material security and psychological well-being. In stating, "Wealth and genius IQ are just as oppressive as poverty" (Final interview, December 15th 2020) Pam equated wealth and intelligence with poverty, reminiscent of Orwellian doublespeak. This construction completely equalized vast disparities of human experience, so that the suffering of the poor became equal to the inconveniences of the rich. Janet's definition of oppression centered around an imagined harmony free of political discourse (29-32). In this case she defined oppression as disagreement. Both examples of oppression lacked a nuanced understanding of the realities of oppression as well as conceptual blindness to privilege and relative security. In these cases anything that fell short of perfect was characterized as oppression.

Janet and Pam both eliminated nuance by drawing parallels between oppression and wealth, intelligence and political discourse. Universalizing oppression worked in tandem with naturalizing it. As Pam stated, "Isn't somebody always going to be oppressed. I mean, otherwise, there's no society" (Journal entry, undated). If oppression is minimized, universalized and naturalized, as in the above examples, there is no rationale for opposing the causes of oppression or working to eradicate them. In other words, oppression is no big deal because everyone

experiences it in some form or another. Ideologically, this discursive structure worked to preserve the status quo, where those who have next to nothing are personally responsible and suffer despite a fair and equitable social system. Through minimization, universalization and naturalization of oppression the social system can be seen to function fair and equitably and twisted logic characterizes a stance against oppression as unnatural.

Moreover, Pam and Janet both voiced a Discourse of naturalized oppression through metaphors of violence and control, in study groups, interviews and writing. Pam revealed the contours of this discourse privately to me in writing and interviews, while in our group setting Janet confessed she compared student participation with victimhood. To illustrate, Pam legitimized her approach to teaching through the banking method using a metaphorical construction of her students as abused animals and she the abuser

34 I can't give my kids power to decide what we're doing and how we're doing it. I have to keep them in a
35 much smaller space. And I feel like you have to...I don't know, maybe, maybe tightening the collar is the
36 way to do it, because you don't realize that you're not free until you can't breathe, you know, and so
37 maybe the banking and maybe the, keeping them…Ok, you're taking notes. You're going to do this. We're
38 doing this my way.

Pam's sadistic rationalization likened pedagogy to a choke-collar (35), with the implication that students were captive animals in a "small space" (34) and that learning was necessarily painful. Pam premised freedom on bondage (35-36) in much the same way teachers in this study earlier premised factual information on higher level thinking skills. By her logic, a person cannot be aware of their oppression (let alone take steps to end it) until they are on the verge of metaphorical death (36). It is not only that people, in her view, cannot be free until they are made unfree, they cannot even be aware of that unfreedom until oppression is taken to the extreme.

Pam began her thought using the pronoun "I" as in "I can't give my kids power (33)" and "I have to keep them in a much smaller space" (33-34). She then shifted the agency of the action to the second person "you," as in "you have to" (34) and "you don't realize" (35) and "you know," (36) which had the effect of aligning the previous "I" statement (meaning Pam) with the subsequent "you" statements (meaning either me as the researcher, or the general teacher self who is the subject of the action this discourse accomplishes). Unifying "I" and "you" pronouns served to generalize Pam's actions to imply that her pedagogical choices were ones that any other teachers would also make out of necessity. What Pam was saying with these alternating pronouns was that her need to keep students in small spaces and tighten their metaphorical collars are actions that all teachers need to do for students' own good.

Pam also expressed this naturalization of oppression in her writing when she asked, "But isn't dehumanization the only thing that makes the oppressed act?" (Journal entry, undated). In this sample, Pam's concept of dehumanization was ultimately a good thing, the only thing as she saw it, that catalyzes revolutionary action. By this twisted logic, the oppressors can take credit for any action the oppressed accomplish, much in the same way Janet called oppressor "leaders of the oppressed" (12-13). In this linguistic world, prejudice, racism and oppression mutate into forces of good, where opportunity is equally accessible to everyone, provided they have the knowledge to take advantage of it.

Left out of her defense of banking pedagogy was how students loosen the metaphorical collar. If, by her logic, students must be pedagogically oppressed in order to realize freedom, how do they get to this point of realization, especially as high school students completing the final years of their compulsory schooling? This omission of the teacher's role in guiding students toward freedom, indicated that Pam did not see that as within her purview as a teacher. The traditional, top-down, teacher-centered approach, which Freire calls the banking method, is in Pam's view twisted as necessarily abusive for the benefit of students. This functioned in tandem with naturalizing oppression. Beyond naturalizing oppression, metaphors of violence and control presented oppressive structures as instructive and useful. The unspoken assumptions Pam was asking me as a listener to fill in were characterizations of students as wild, animalistic and in need of subduing.

In our first group discussion Janet provided another example of metaphors of violence in the context of her instruction. When describing her discourse around student participation she stated:

39 The kids know they have to discuss things because one of my mantras is, you know, volunteer a victim.
40 And I love victims. I love getting victims. And I let them know, "OK, you know, I love picking my victims,
41 but be prepared for an articulate response to what we're discussing." (Group discussion 1, October 9th 2020)

Janet clarified that she did not mean she only referred to students as victims in the context of our sessions, but that she actually called her students victims (39). Janet did not question how characterizing students as victims could be perceived by them, and how this perception could affect students' learning or experience in school. By referring to her students as victims of her own action, she positioned students as prey, and she the predator. Students in this discursive construction were acted-upon, rather than nurtured as agentive subjects. In hearing these statements I could not help but ask: What was the source of Janet and Pam understanding students in this way? What larger social structures in their contexts share depictions of students as wild animals?

Limitations

Limitations, defined as the "characteristics of design or methodology that impact or influence the interpretation of the findings" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 164) consisted of my biases as a critically-oriented academic, the limited amount of time I spent with participants, and the inability to observe their classes in person due to the pandemic.

Because I was not immersed in their classroom environments, where I may have had the opportunity to discover contradictions and or alignment in their statements or build extensive trust over time, I limit my findings to teacher ideologies and speculate about the relationship between ideology and practice. Three focus groups, two interviews with each teacher, and informal member checks were insufficient to provide opportunities to observe how what is said may differ from what is done. My goal, however, was limited to understanding the ideological dimensions of how teachers responded to critical pedagogy, not to what extent they practiced this theory with their students. To address these limitations, I designed the introductory script to encourage participants to speak critically and freely, and limited my analysis to how their language functioned in relation to social power.

Focused on a single school site, I do not generalize to all schools or make claims about the extent to which all White teachers may naturalize oppression. Furthermore, I did not seek to definitively exhume all ideological motivations at the root of White teachers' perceptions of critical pedagogy. As opposed to external generalizability, in combination with transferability I seek "internal generalizability," that is, "the generalizability of a conclusion *within* the case, setting, or group studied" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 137). With a detailed description of the research site, my positionality, my participants and the social and political context at the time of the study, I leave it to my readers and future researchers to determine if, for example, other White teachers elsewhere use discursive moves like naturalizing oppression (in combination with metaphors of violence) in order to accomplish denial of responsibility for anti-oppressive teaching, as I found.

Conclusion

Discourse in these examples was the polar opposite of what Freire (2018) describes, where "dialogue cannot exist…in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people" (p. 89). Teachers who think of and talk about students as victims and abused animals will likely damage children who have no choice but to try to endure and thrive in spite of these positionings by teachers. These metaphors served to justify the banking method of pedagogy as necessary for preparation in *the real world*, where hierarchy, structure and submission to authority were naturalized as necessary and unavoidable.

Examples of White people comparing people of color (which are the majority of RHS students) to animals are many throughout the history of colonization (Collins, 2005; Ferber, 2007). This discursive construction dehumanizes students, and perversely humanizes the one who does the oppressing. Much in the same way Native Indigenous peoples in the United States, Canada and Australia underwent inhumane processes of deculturalization through the systematic abuse of so-called Indian boarding schools, those teachers and administrators were seen as carrying out a so-called civilizing mission for what they argued was the benefit of those peoples.

Pam and Janet both revealed this discourse with its roots in colonial ideology, which positioned students as uncivilized and the teacher as the benevolent civilizer. White teachers linking violence and control to education is a disturbing continuation of the colonial project. More research is needed to understand to what extent teachers hold beliefs that dehumanize students and characterize learning as necessarily painful or violent, all the while professing their love for their students (Matias, 2014). Educational fads and strategies (in the absence of radical action at the level of policy) will fail to transform student outcomes as long as teachers think that oppression is natural and necessary for learning and the social order. Ideologies that make possible metaphors of students as victims and teaching as a choke collar, for example, deserve serious interrogation with future teachers, especially when those teachers are White teachers predominately teaching students of color. This study adds consideration of metaphors of violence to existing literature about how teachers talk about students in absentia, and what this talk reveals about their underlying ideologies and practices. Ideological critique from a Critical Discourse Studies perspective with teacher education students and practicing teachers can help to bring these dominant ideologies to the surface of consciousness through language and dialogue, so that their implications can be examined.

Appendix

Participants' overview of information (all names are pseudonyms)

	SUBJECT	GRADE	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	PERSONAL IDENTIFIERS	POLITICAL AFFILIATION
JANET	English	9	24	female, Anglo	Declined to state
ARTHUR	U.S. History & AP Government/Economics	11 & 12	34	Anglo	left-wing Democrat
JOAQUÍN	Ethnic Studies/Mexican-American Literature	9-12	22	Chicano/Mexican-American	far-left, radical liberal
OLIVIA	Geometry	9	11	midwestern, Christian, White	moderate conservative
ROXANNE	Social Studies	11 & 12	24	White, middle-class American	moderate liberal
SIMON	Algebra (special education)	11 &12	3	White male	Centrist
PAM	English	9	18	mom, female, White, wife	Republican

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