On Whiteness and Becoming Warm Demanders

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ABSTRACT

Being a White teacher educator in a Northern urban setting serving a student body that is also predominantly White and working to middle-class from small towns and suburbs outside of the city presents unique challenges. They necessitate a pedagogy that disrupts stories inherent in the collective memory (Buffington, 2019) of these students. Helping students think critically about their developing teacher identities through exposure to new ideas and investigations of old ideas is key. This article describes what I am learning from a semester-long endeavor to guide students to reflect on race and teaching identity through the lens of "warm demanding" (Vasquez, 1988; Ware, 2006).

KEYWORDS: warm demander, pedagogy, whiteness, reflexivity, pre-service education, critical race theory

Perfection is a stick with which to beat the possible.

Rebecca Solnit, 2016, p. 77

Introduction

Joni Acuff's call for this special issue forthrightly directs White art educators "to more critically and intentionally engage in race work (Acuff, 2018, p. 2). Toward that end, this essay centers on at a semester-long attempt by a White teacher educator to graft the notion of *warm demanders* onto a curriculum that centers on urban education and teaching for social justice (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Collins, 1990; Delpit, 2012; Hambacher, Acosta, Bondy & Ross, 2016; Irvine, 1998, 2002; Vasquez, 1988; Ware, 2006). I am always searching for inroads to becoming anti-racist, and a culturally responsive advocate for children of color (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Because our teacher education program is situated in the Northern city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a city that routinely and shamefully comes out on top of lists of "most segregated cities" in the U.S. (Downs, 2015; Frey, 2015), these roads are filled with potholes.[1] Jarring and uncomfortable as they may be to traverse, I try to get my students to stay on this

difficult road. This is a tale of openness and resistance, of good intentions and not so good implementation, and of learning from small successes as well as failures. Failure as a White teacher educator who seeks to practice anti-racist pedagogy is becoming a subgenre in art education research (Broome, 2018; Spillane, 2015). As these authors assert, failure can, if we let it, be a great teacher. Upon reflection, I see that pushing a group of mostly White, Northern Midwest preservice teachers out of the safe and cozy place White privilege creates, in the context of the obfuscating and euphemizing culture of the Northern Midwest, requires a different form of warm demanding than has been written about thus far. Thus, with this article, I aim to share what I have learned about warm demanding with fellow art educators, while also contributing to the growing body of literature on warm demanding by adding a focus on Whiteness, specifically Northern Midwest Whiteness.

I begin with a review of the literature on warm demanders, which sits within the larger frame of culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Following that, I offer a brief description of the class of students who were part of this journey and what happened during a semester in which I introduced warm demanders as a lens through which to develop an understanding of a teacher identity, paying close attention to the special challenges that presented themselves related to race and place. Finally, I close the paper by exploring possible implications for other teacher educators and their students committed to working toward a more just world.

Review of Literature on Warm Demanders

A growing body of literature describes successful teachers of African American students as warm demanders (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Collins, 1990; Delpit, 2012; Irvine, 1998; Vasquez, 1988; Ware, 2006). According to Bondy and Ross (2008), Judith Kleinfeld (1975) "coined the phrase warm demander to describe the type of teacher who was effective in teaching Athabaskan Indian and Eskimo 9th graders in Alaskan schools" (p. 55). Over time, the phrase warm demander has shifted

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Potholes are a traffic phenomenon many people in the Northern U.S. obsess over. While they can be dangerous, they are generally just a nuisance caused as pavement breaks down because of cycles of freezing and thawing. Lack of investment in infrastructure also contributes to the problem. I once heard a rich White guy complain to a candidate at a public forum that driving down his street was like "living in a third-world country." While this is obviously an absurd manifestation of White privilege, politicians in the north have to take potholes seriously. A campaign called "Scott Holes" https://www.scottholes.com/ played a part in the recent defeat of racist Republican Governor Scott Walker.

toward describing effective African American teachers of African American students in underfunded urban schools.

An early example is James Vasquez, who used the term to describe highly successful teachers of color in his 1988 article "Contexts of Learning for Minority Students." Vasquez studied learning contexts and student perceptions of teachers, finding warm demanders described as teachers of color who share an understanding of the contextual challenges faced by their students and who demonstrate they care in culturally relevant ways. It is fitting that the move toward framing successful teachers of African American students as warm demanders came first from a study of student perceptions because student-centeredness lies at the heart of the concept of warm demanding (Alexander, 2016).

Subsequent studies that focus on warm demanders have expanded our understanding of the traits of strong African American women who are successful teachers (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). According to Jacqueline Jordan Irvine (1998), warm demanders create "tough-minded, no-nonsense, structured, and disciplined classroom environment(s) for kids whom society has psychologically and physically abandoned" (para. 2). She goes on to say that a warm demander is a teacher who teaches "African-American students with a sense of passion and mission based in the African-American cultural traditions and history she shares with her students" (para. 2).

Franita Ware (2006) presents case studies of two African American teachers focusing on the impact of culture and relationship building on student success. Setting the stage for her argument, Ware agreed with Irvine (1990) and Delpit (1995) that the mismatch of school culture, which is predicated on White middle class cultural norms, and the cultures of students of color is problematic and creates roadblocks to success. Inclusion of students' culture was found to be an important component in the practices of the warm demanders Ware studied.

Ware goes on to point to evidence that during the period of *de jure* segregation, African American teachers were models of warm demanding in the segregated schools of the past, citing Vanessa Siddle Walker (2001) who "revealed that there were many positive experiences in segregated schools" (Ware, 2006, p. 429). Desegregation and the subsequent transition to *de facto* resegregation has had a negative effect on the number of African American teachers in the workforce. Ware also cites research that shows that schools where there remain a higher percentage of African American teachers African American students are more successful on a range of measures.

Melanie Acosta (2105) studied urgency as a phenomenon in African American educators' stances toward teaching. She found the teachers in her study to have an understanding of the social, economic, and political implications of schooling and African American student experience, which compelled them to push their students to be their best. Acosta sees a need for reform in teacher education, saying:

> (T)eacher educators must redesign their approaches to urban educator preparation in ways that legitimately build on African American philosophies and perspectives if schools of education are to be leaders in the effort to improve education for students of African descent in urban schools. (p. 983)

I agree that inclusion of content and experiences that help pre-service teachers understand the implications of the current racist system of education for African American and other children of color is important to developing a stance as a warm demander.

In the 2008 text *The Teacher as Warm Demander*, Elizabeth Bondy and Dorene Ross ask "How can you create an engaging classroom?" then answer "Convince students first that you care—and then that you'll never let up" (para. 1). This emphasis on holding students to a high standard of achievement in a caring way is a hallmark of a warm demander. Bondy and Ross (2008) go on to assert:

> What is missing is not skill in lesson planning, but a teacher stance that communicates both warmth and a nonnegotiable demand for student effort and mutual respect. This stance—often called the warm demander –is central to sustaining academic engagement in high-poverty schools. (para. 5)

So much of teacher education, including assessments such as the edTPA, focuses heavily on curriculum and instruction and very little the emotional and philosophical learning, yet affective learning makes up an important component of anti-racist, culturally responsive teaching (Cosier, 2016; Dress, 2012). According to Irvine (1998), though the research clearly shows that warm demanders are successful, these teachers can often be seen in a negative light when their practices are assessed based on teaching standards that privilege Whiteness and middle class values. Warm demanders can appear to be harsh and uncaring when viewed through a traditional, White teacher assessment lens (Irvine, 1998). This has implications for how White preservice teachers aspire to be, or not to be, warm demanders as well. I recommend Bondy and Ross's (2008) article as a starting point to introduce preservice teachers to the concept of warm demanding. One mistake I made in my first attempt was to assign a

traditional scholarly article as an introduction to warm demanding, which put up unnecessary barriers to understanding for many of my students causing them to complain that the reading was too difficult. While their article does not focus on pre-service teachers, Bondy and Ross's work is written in an accessible manner while clearly defining and describing what becoming a warm demander looks like in the classroom. It lays out three actions teachers can take to become warm demanders:

1. Build relationships deliberately,
2. Learn about students' and our own cultures and,
3. Communicate an expectation of success.

Like most of the literature on successful teachers of African American children in underfunded urban schools and warm demanding, this article focuses on teachers who are, themselves, African American. There are very few sources on warm demanders that address Whiteness. In my review of the literature, I found one essay, *The Warm Demander: An Equity Approach*, by Matt Alexander (2016) in which the author discusses his own identity as a White teacher. The article that started this journey, *Elementary Preservice Teachers as Warm Demanders in an African American School,* by Elyse Hambacher, Melanie Acosta, Elizabeth Bondy, and Dorene Ross (2016), is the first study on warm demanders that focuses on preservice teachers and is the second of only two articles I was able to find that focus on a White subject. The authors were interested in answering the question "How do teachers think about and enact warm demanding?" Though they focus on one White and one Latinx pre-service teacher this question does not name Whiteness or race as a factor. Finding ways for pre-service teachers to reflect on and interrogate Whiteness and race is an area of study that needs more attention.

Our Story of Working to Become Warm Demanders

This is not the story I hoped to share with you. In fact, if you are looking for an inspirational tale about a White teacher educator who channeled Moses and Harriet Tubman to successfully create a dialogic space that led her predominantly White students to the promised land of enlightened anti-racist teaching, you will not find that here. Though my goals for the semester's learning were not realized, the hard work of cultivating hope while looking critically at how we fit into systems of privilege and oppression must go on. In the end, this is as much a story about my own shortcomings as a warm demander as it is about students who resisted deep interrogations of race and identity.

As I planned for an elementary methods course I would teach in the Fall of 2018, I wanted to build in more ways than I had in the past

to explore how White teachers' identities influence their work with children of color. I planned the beginning of the semester to focus on the affective parts of teaching, not just looking at mechanics but at the bigger ideas, the heart and soul parts of teaching (Cosier, 2016; Dress, 2012). This, in itself, was not new, but I wanted to implement a more sustained engagement on issues of identity and teaching than I had in the past and I was particularly interested in implementing a new framework for this investigation through the idea of successful teachers of African American students as "warm demanders" (Hambacher, Acosta, Bondy, & Ross, 2016).

The group of students was even Whiter than the normal demographic in our teacher education program, with all but one student in the group of 22 appearing and/or perceiving themselves to be White. Most identified as middle or working class and hailed from rural and suburban places outside of the City of Milwaukee, which is one of the few parts of Wisconsin with a significant population of people of color. According to a study by the Brookings Institute, Milwaukee continues to top the list of most segregated cities in the country (Frey, 2018). As a result, White students come to our university having had little experience with people of color, particularly African Americans. They also come with entrenched ideas about the city as a place of crime and violence, though they routinely say they are not racist. Most have been exposed to very little talk about racism and White privilege and this group was particularly reticent when the subjects were brought up in class.

We began the course reading list with an article by Amelia Dress (2012) that called upon teacher education to attend to matters of the spirit. From the beginning, I urged my students to "lean into the sharp points" as Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön (2001, p. 75) says, in order to push through their discomfort and grow and become better allies to the students they would serve. I wanted to find ways to help them understand that having the option not to push through our failures is a way White privilege operates. Getting this group to lean in to this challenge, however, turned out to be more of a bumpy ride than usual.

In addition to traditional class meetings, field experiences are integrated into this six-credit course, with students spending two afternoons per week for at least eight weeks in an urban public school. We place students in non-art as well as art classrooms so that we can have a cohort of students together in one school in an effort to get them to come to feel part of a community. Our elementary school partner, Lloyd Barbee Montessori, named for a prominent civil rights activist, is a public specialty school situated in a north central neighborhood in Milwaukee called Garden Homes. Garden Homes is a neighborhood that is almost completely populated by

impoverished and underserved African American people who have been successfully sequestered by segregation. Driving to the school, you see ramshackle dwellings, storefront churches, and small businesses, many of which have the tell-tale, blueish-green plywood over the windows, signifying foreclosure. Those businesses that are still open include automotive parts chain stores, mom and pop liquor and tobacco shops, storefront churches, and lots of shabby daycares of the sort that cropped up after Wisconsin effectively did away with welfare in the 1990s and pushed African American women into a workplace that had no room for them (see Cosier, 2011). Hardly anyone stops for red lights and lots of drivers will pass you on the right going 50 miles per hour in a school zone, which is just one of the dangers people in the neighborhood face.

Lloyd Barbee Montessori has an incredible principal who was once an art teacher, with whom I have partnered for almost two decades. She affirms that her little community struggles in the face of the many challenges that White supremacy and segregation have created. In the Pulitzer Prize winning book, *Evicted,* Matthew Desmond (2016) describes the lives of people who are part of the Lloyd Barbee community. They are faced with constant trauma, at the mercy of predatory landlords who rent them apartments that are full of lead and other dangers. Four out of five African American children in Wisconsin live in poverty (Downs, 2015), and "the state ranks last in the country in the overall well-being of African-American children based on an index of 12 measures that gauge a child's success from birth to adulthood," according to a report by the Wisconsin Council on Children & Families (Boulten, 2014, para. 2). Going to Lloyd Barbee makes my students feel unsafe, and they are to some extent, but I see it as my job to help them see that the children we are working with are at much greater danger than we, and that our complicities in White supremacy contribute to that, so we have an obligation to forge ahead on this pothole cratered road.

It is not possible to cover all of the content from the course here but the focus on identity and race was threaded throughout, as was plenty of insistence on reflection. We encountered many potholes along the road, and often had to hit the brakes in order to stay on track. In broad strokes, we investigated the ways we come to know ourselves through the stories we are told and tell. We linked to the idea of *counterstories* (Adichie, n.d.; Whitehead, 2012; Yasso, 2006), a strategy that grew out of Critical Race Theory, to the work of contemporary artists of color such as Glenn Ligon, Lorna Simpson, Wangechi Mutu, Nina Chanel Abney, and others. We returned to warm demanding throughout the semester in discussions on what was happening in their Lloyd Barbee Montessori classrooms. They added to their storehouse of information about the particulars of race and identity, racism, and White supremacy in Milwaukee through

additional readings, videos, guest presenters, and short lectures. Because we accompany our students to the schools every time they go, we have many shared stories of real-world teaching and learning to draw upon, connecting theory to practice. Despite these efforts, the majority of students in the group remained resistant to engaging in deep discussions of race in class.

Throughout the semester, students were required to reflect in their journals on these ideas relative to their experiences in our partner school. I provided written formative feedback on multiple occasions urging them to dig more deeply into identity and race when I noticed that most were only scratching the surface. Trying to remain optimistic, in the final week of class I asked them to go back one last time to the ideas presented in the warm demander article to reflect on their learning over the course of the semester relative to burgeoning teacher identities. When I completed final assessments of the reflective journals, however, I was disappointed to find next to nothing on the topic of race. I had failed as a warm demander to my students. Writing this essay has allowed me to reflect deeply on the experience and has given me some insights that may help in the future.

Learning from Failure

Even though I deliberately named Whiteness, White privilege, and racism throughout the course in both content and discussion, this group of students were extremely reticent to discuss and write about race. They knew from the formative assessments provided that they would not earn full credit for these assignments if they continued to avoid the subject, Yet, if they attended to race at all, it was in a superficial manner that did not reveal a substantive change in their frames of reference about identity and teaching. With regard to becoming warm demanders, students were enthusiastic about the aspect of care, but they either ignored or resisted the idea that warm demanders engage with politically charged understandings of how race is implicated in schooling.

Originally, I had planned to include quotes from the reflective journals to help tell the story of our journey but, in the end, there just wasn't any point because I found only platitudes. Most students claimed to aspire to be warm demanders, but they whitewashed warm demanding to being caring yet firm. In this space, I seek to share a developing understanding of why this was so. I do not claim to come close to fully understanding all answers –or even yet all the questions—but I believe it is important that I lean into the sharp points, myself, and continue to try. I have spent time writing this to reflect on what stood in our way in the hopes of learning from failure and moving closer to becoming a warm demander.

The remainder of the article focuses on those potholes and roadblocks and what may be done to help address them.

Potholes and Roadblocks

While the reasons for my failure to enact warm demanding fully are many, I will focus most closely on the unique forms of White Privilege that come from our location in the deep Northern Midwest. There are, of course, other factors that came into play, such as state-mandated assessments including the edTPA, which have been shown to be biased against warm demanders (Irvine, 1998). The general move in our culture away from talking directly to other human beings and the resulting increase in social anxiety does not help either, but there is not space to explore all of the reasons and it seems to me that the parts that are connected to where we are from are most salient.

Lack of Role Models of Warm Demanders

To date, the research on warm demanders focuses almost exclusively on successful African American teachers of African American students. Because of the hyper-segregated nature of Milwaukee and the State of Wisconsin, most students in my class had not had an African American teacher in their own K-12 education with whom to identify. Additionally, at Lloyd Barbee Montessori, all of the cooperating teachers we worked with were White. They did, to varying degrees, model care and holding students to high standards, but they did not share a cultural history and did not readily express a commitment to engaging with the political nature of teaching. To make matters worse, the one teacher who overtly expressed a commitment to social justice turned in her resignation midway through our time in the school. Therefore, my students did not see themselves reflected in warm demanding in theory or in practice. There was one school community member who was an excellent example of a warm demander but she was not a teacher and did not work directly with my students. In the future I plan to work with her and the principal of the school to create some shared professional development around culturally responsive teaching and warm demanding in hopes of supporting the students of Lloyd Barbee and my own students more fully.

White Fragility and White Privilege in the General Sense

A White student came back to class and shared an experience in her Lloyd Barbee classroom that troubled her. A five-year-old African American student had said something that the student took to mean, "I hate you and all White people." Many students were agitated by this and some joined in talking about feeling injured by something that was said to them in anger and frustration. I feel for them,

they tried to care, and the person they were attempting to care for rejected them. While this is clearly a case of genuine hurt feelings, it can also be an example of White fragility, which Robin DiAngelo (2011) describes the ways White people have "expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress" (p. 54). While it can be painful, we must lean into that discomfort and not allow fragility to keep us from doing race work. It is also an example of the problems inherent in the White savior (Cammarota, 2011) syndrome in which White teachers see themselves as tools of uplift for students of color.

While partly a natural human reaction to rejection, over time, I have come to understand that the students' shock is also partially because, as White people, they are unaccustomed to being lumped into a racial group that is perceived in a negative light. While people of color deal with this all of the time, my students have an expectation to be judged on an individual basis that is a symptom of White privilege. It is important to take the time to work through the justifiable causes for the 5 year-old's response to their caring overtures and commit to developing more ways to do so in our program and to parse the ways incidents like these can teach us more about ourselves than it may about others. I need to work on finding ways for my students to develop a critical yet empathetic stance that checks White fragility and the White savior syndrome while opening space for them to examine how they fit within the White supremacist social order.

Growing up in the Deep North

In a recent article urging art teachers to confront hate, Melanie Buffington (2019) sounded a moving call to action for art educators around the debates on Confederate monuments. As part of her argument, Buffington discusses the concept of *collective memory*, saying it "is a social concept that addressees how communities and societies create an understanding of the past that may or may not be founded on the facts" (p. 15). Buffington goes on to dismantle a number of myths connected to collective memory that are invoked in arguments for the preservation of Confederate monuments. As I read this article, I was inspired and encouraged that it appeared in *Art Education* knowing that particular journal reaches a wide audience of practitioners and scholars, alike. However, my next realization was that my own students will read this and it will confirm for them that they have no work to do around racism since I teach in the deep North. Our collective memory teaches us that it is Southerners, not we, who are racist. Our forbearers, after all, did not enslave people, or so we are told.

Northern racism is much less transparent than Southern racism. It is obfuscated by a collective memory of being on the right side of

history. In an excellent article on the particular problem of Northern racism, Lanahan, (2015) quotes the late comedian, Dick Gregory:

> 'Personally, I've never seen much difference between the South and the North,' comedian Dick Gregory wrote in a 1971 issue of *Ebony*. 'Down South white folks don't care how close I get as long as I don't get too big. Up North white folks don't care how big I get as long as I don't get too close.'
>
> That's the famous part of the quote. Gregory goes on to say, 'In the South, black folks have been abused by the white man physically. In the North, black folks have been abused by the white power structure mentally. The difference is that in the North the white system is more clever with its abuse.' (paras. 4 and 5)

That cleverness does a number on the psyche of White people from the North. As a collective, we grow up sincerely believing we are not racist. We are taught to think that our road is clear when it is rutted with unnoticed patterns of behavior.

Of course, a storyline that paints Northern White people as harmless reveals a profound ignorance of the history of race in America, which is not, to put things mildly, the version of history taught in U.S. schools (Kendi, 2016). Looking back, I see I should have paid more attention than I did to our Northern collective memory and gaps in historical knowledge when I tried to implement a warm demander framework. Though I did address some content in lectures, I should have found other ways to address our racist history while bearing in mind that what I've come to know about our history over a long career focused on urban education is not the norm. My students really don't know that racists have been here since White people stole this land from the Native Americans who lived here. These are not the stories they've been told by their former teachers, family members, or in popular culture. When faced with alternative historical narratives such as slave ownership in New York (Smith, 1949), for example, they may also hear voices from childhood (such as their Uncle Travis or television personality Bill O'Reilly) railing against politically correct, revisionist history, voices that were formative and can be difficult to quiet. Northern collective memory has taught my students that they should think slavery was bad and that racists are some other people, not them. My students, like many Northern White people, are unaware of a great deal of the histories of African Americans and the ways most White people have benefitted from the myriad ways oppression has been woven into the fabric of the United States of America. They do not know that the labor of enslaved people in the South allowed the North, and ultimately the United States as a whole,

to become what it is today. The following are just two of many vital pieces of history that I believe I need to better address and situate in this particular place of teaching and learning. I need to find more ways for students to understand the idiosyncratic historical context of teaching in Milwaukee.

The Great Migration helped create the economic boom of post-war America. African American people joined the Northern workforce in great numbers, and they were met with a virulent form of Northern racism that differed from Southern racism. After he started to organize in Chicago, this difference caused Dr. Martin Luther King to change his mind about White people. He no longer believed they all wished for redemption. As the Rust Belt region began to decline economically, racial tensions escalated. This problem was compounded in Milwaukee because African American people didn't move here in great numbers until the 1960s, when the boom was already beginning to bust. Thus, there is little to no Black middle class here, and further, White Wisconsinites often equate African Americans with bad times.

Racist policies like redlining enforced segregation and, although we just celebrated the 50-year anniversary of the historic fair housing *March on Milwaukee*,[2] none of my students could name any details about the event's historical relevance. They knew nothing about Vel Phillips, the firebrand who became the first African American woman to do so many important things in our state. They had not heard about the *Milwaukee Commandos*, nor did they know that the White mayor of Milwaukee probably secretly ordered NAACP headquarters to be firebombed (Miner, 2013). None offered up stories passed down to them from their grandmothers and grandfathers about throwing racial slurs –and maybe even bricks— at the marchers…because we don't talk about such things here; it isn't nice. And yet, for me to be a warm demander to my students, I have to find ways to get them to talk about things that are not nice.

Midwest Nice and Warm Demanding

According to Elizabeth Bondy and Doreen Ross (2008),

> Warm demanders also recognize that their own cultural backgrounds guide their values, beliefs, and behaviors. Although it can be difficult to perceive one's own culture, culture consistently shapes an
>
> individual's behavior and reactions to the behavior of

2 For more information about this exciting and important story see UWM Libraries *March on Milwaukee Civil Rights History Project* https://uwm.edu/marchon-milwaukee/

> others. Gaining insight into cultural values and habits helps teachers monitor their reactions to student behaviors that they might deem "bad," but that are considered normal or even valued in the student's home culture. Without such reflection, a teacher's implicit assumptions can inadvertently communicate to students a lack of caring. (p. 56)

Avoidance of the difficulties inherent in race work contributes to the problems White supremacy and racism have created for people of color, particularly African Americans (Knight, 2006). White privilege and White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011) are at play in this discomfort and must be named and addressed forthrightly. Yet forthrightness (dare I say forthrightly?) is the antithesis of the subtle and passive-aggressive communication style of the Midwest, as Paul Kix (2015) explains in his essay *Midwestern Nice: A Tribute to a Sincere and Suffocating Way of Life*. Midwest nice presents special challenges in the pursuit of anti-racist art teacher education. Many of us were taught that we just don't talk about ugly things here in the Midwest. Thus, devising ways to help students understand their own Northern/Midwestern brand of White culture in relation to other people's children (Delpit, 2006) is an ongoing project. I did not succeed this semester in totally breaking through the cocoon of Northern identity and Midwest nice, becoming an effective warm demander to my students. But I must keep trying.

Becoming a Warm Demander as a White Teacher Educator

Since the literature on warm demanders focuses on African American teachers, forging an identity as a warm demander as a White teacher educator of mostly white students is a sort of photographic negative of warm demanding. With each new class of pre-service art teachers, I am faced with this challenge: to persuade people who think they have no work to do with regard to race, to do some of the most difficult work imaginable. I struggle to find ways to crack this particular kind of White privilege –the protective coating with which Northern-ness envelops us and the vague platitudes of Midwest nice.

Because I, myself, grew up White in the Midwest, I have had to learn to push through culturally bound ways of being in the world, shedding the armor of "niceness" and leaning into the sharp points of race work. Becoming a warm demander to my students is a work in progress. It is not altruistic work, however, and I must remind myself, and my students, that it is beneficial to all people to do it. According to historian Ibram X. Kendi (2016), though difficult, working toward anti-racism is actually in the "*intelligent self-interest*" of most people because making society more equitable for African American people makes it better for nearly everyone else (emphasis in original, p. 504).

Despite mounting evidence that the North is now a worse place to live than the South if you are an African American person (Sisson, 2014), White people in the North continue to blame Black people for their problems, or, if they are feeling generous, frame them as victims of some other people's hatred. The vast majority of my students have been in that latter camp. Students come to our program with a sincere desire to help with the problems associated with racism, but they see themselves as caretakers and saviors, not demanders. In one of the more thoughtful journal reflections, a student who did dig a little deeper than most accidentally referred to warm demanders as "warm defenders"…this was telling to me. They see themselves as doing good for others, as is the Midwestern way, but they have a hard time envisioning themselves as demanders. Demanding seems so aggressive and assertive from a Midwestern cultural perspective. I need to continue to develop my own muscle of warm demanding in order to help them become demanders as well as defenders.

In closing, I am left with more questions than answers. How might we learn from and expand upon the scholarship on warm demanders relative to teacher education programs that continue to enroll a majority of White students who are taught by White professors? What teacher education strategies might we develop to navigate the potholes and roadblocks inherent in this work and move White students to become warm demanders? How can we teacher educators become warm demanders to our pre-service teachers in order to help them become so for their K-12 students? If I am going to become a warm demander myself in order to get my students to be so, I need to devise more ways to push myself and my students toward these goals:

- Matching care with authority in a way that models warm demanding;
- Pushing harder than feels comfortable;
- Setting aside our fears of not being nice;
- Developing deeper, more nuanced, understandings of the contexts in which we teach;
- Developing a more vivid sense of ourselves within the cultures that White privilege and racism have created.

Understanding that the development of anti-racist pedagogical practice is a messy, never finished project puts this work into a kind of framework that allows for mistakes to happen as long as we learn from them. But never expecting to fully succeed can be daunting to White academics and White students who have learned to learn within a system that tells them they have a right to succeed. As Rebecca Solnit (2016) reminds us, however, "perfection is a stick with which to beat the possible" (p. 77). I failed this semester as a warm demander but I am not going to beat myself with the stick

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