Editorial: Whiteness and Art Education

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> *Whiteness is a complex, hegemonic, and dynamic set of mainstream socio-economic processes, and ways of thinking, feeling, believing, and acting (cultural scripts) that function to obscure the power, privilege, and practices of the dominant social elite. Whiteness drives oppressive individual, group, and corporate practices that adversely impact schools, the wider society and indeed societies worldwide. Lea & Sims, 2008, p.2*

In 2015, White art educator, researcher, scholar, Dr. Sunny Spillane wrote a pointed and candid article, titled "The failure of whiteness in art education: A personal narrative informed by Critical Race Theory." The paper called out the ways whiteness lurks in the crevices of all of her art education work, even though she purposefully assumes a social justice lens. But she admits that her social justice stance was not necessarily an anti-racist stance, thus did not *require* her to identify whiteness as a structure that needed to be analyzed and destabilized. Spillane (2015) explains, "In order to understand the impact of racial discrimination, it is important to recognize its function in securing and maintaining white privilege. This may be a challenge, as many whites--including myself--are neither accustomed to nor comfortable with thinking about ourselves in racial terms" (Spillane, 2015, p. 59). Spillane goes on to proclaim that regardless of the intent to do critical art education that emphasizes racial equity, when whiteness goes unexamined, it maintains its place at the center. "Speaking from the center" (Yancy, 2004, p. 1) continues to wage normative demands on people of color.

In 2017, I conducted an interview with Spillane that followed up on some of the topics embedded within her "Failure of whiteness" article. During our chat, I frankly asked Spillane, "What do you wish you were taught about whiteness before you entered the classroom?" Spillane thoughtfully responded, "I wish I understood whiteness as the lynchpin of systems of racial meaning in the raced society that we live in. I wish that I understood that whiteness wasn't just another racial category, but that people are racialized differently in relation to whiteness. I wish that I understood [race] as a social fiction; and, that it is critical to not just be conscious of myself as a raced individual, but of the systems of racial meaning and their import for the field" (personal communication, 2017).

The *jCRAE* "Whiteness and Art Education" mini-theme aims to do some of the work that Spillane (2017) refers to, especially the task of identifying whiteness as the lynchpin of systems of racial meaning, and moreover, of racial oppression within art education. Issue 2 of Volume 36, as did Issue 1, brings together conscious voices that ask new questions, make critical considerations and promote anti-racist teaching strategies that decenter and destabilize whiteness within the art education field. From classroom resources to classroom language, arts archives to research strategies, the authors in this issue identify the ways "white hegemony functions to obscure the power and privilege and practices of the dominant social elite and reproduce inequities and inequalities within [art] education and wider society" (Lea & Sims, 2008, back cover). The authors offer strategies for developing the critical consciousness and anti-racist practices that Spillane (2015) vulnerably shares that she failed at, and thus advocates for.

Melanie Buffington opens Volume 36, Issue 2 by taking stock of the sites where whiteness lives in art education. In her research, Buffington points out that whiteness circulates the art education field through materials like specific pieces of quintessential literature that the field has named significant, and in everyday teaching resources like artist posters used to introduce young children to visual artists. Essentially, Buffington works to unmask the pervasiveness of whiteness so that efforts can be made to disrupt the structural racism that lives within art education. Then, **Beth Balliro and Lyssa Paluay** use Critical Race Theory to make sense of the ways that archived American art and design education history aid in the perpetuation of white supremacy in contemporary college art classrooms. Using research completed at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt), the co-authors identify the counternarratives of students, faculty and staff of color as a methodology of resistance, culture change, and archival reclamation.

In an engaging personal narrative, **Adriane Pereira** analyzes her lived experiences surrounding "becoming" a woman of color. Describing the shift from self-identifying as a White Hispanic woman to being categorized by a catch-all term, "woman of color," Pereira examines the complexity and fluidity of the social construct of race. Using Anzaldua's Borderlands theory and Delueze and Guattari's theorizing on "becoming," Pereira ultimately completes a critical examination of the ways her "becoming" a woman of color consequently drives her artist and art education identity. Next, **Diane Kuthy and Olivia Robinson** offer a creative work that brings to light the visual culture of whiteness, and the ways whiteness is maintained through historical and contemporary imagery. The co-authors present their series of handmade quilts, titled *Swaddled*, as art-based intervention for disrupting white supremacy in the arts and visual culture.

Injeong Yoon uses autoethnography to examine the ways whiteness has impacted her self-actualization as a Korean woman, immigrant, and as an art educator of color in the classroom. Laying out her positionality with frankness and vulnerability, Yoon's research is pivotal in revealing the ways whiteness can be internalized by people of color, but also the ways it can be destabilized through intentional critical self reflexivity, which consequently impacts her work as an art educator. Yoon takes readers on her journey of resilience and survival as an academic in a predominantly white field. Then, **Dionne Custer** presents a creative prose that questions the way children of color are nurtured to develop, or in this case leave behind, an artist identity. This contribution reveals the significant power of art educators' words and actions, thus making readers (art educators) question how seriously they take their responsibility to teach and encourage all children inside and outside of the classroom. Issue 2 of "Whiteness and Art Education" wraps with **Tyler Denmead's** work, "White Warnings." In his paper, Denmead identifies the ways reflexivity in research can end up re-centering and reinvesting in whiteness, creating a double bind. Denmead's work also takes to task the "Creative Cities" discourse, particularly the way whiteness is unmarked in the concept of "the creative."

Volume 36 of *jCRAE* forefronts a discussion about what happens to whiteness once it has been made visible to white people. What happens to whiteness when its normality has been interrupted? (Bell, 2017). The authors share personal reflections, paths of exploration, and even actionable items that may be able to assist the art education field in establishing a new way to talk about race and engage in transformative practices that calls out and challenges the pervasiveness of whiteness in art education.

References

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