A Balancing Act:
ethical dilemmas of democratic
teaching within critical pedagogy

CAROLYN McKINNEY
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

ABSTRACT This article discusses practitioner research that focused on student resistance to teaching about the apartheid past and issues of 'race' in a first year English studies course at a predominantly Afrikaans and 'white' university in South Africa. The study aimed to explore the way in which students and the teacher engaged with a form of critical pedagogy moment-by-moment in the classroom. In this article, I turn the analytical spotlight onto myself, analysing the way in which my own multiple and sometimes contradictory identity positions as an educator play themselves out. In particular, I explore the tensions between my preferred 'democratic' teaching style, and my moral or ethical views. I argue that this tension creates a dilemma for teaching within critical pedagogy, which is not easily resolved. I also reflect on the experience of researching my own teaching practice, and attempt to understand how my research insights were developed, linking this to the distinction between reflective practice and action research.

Keywords: critical pedagogy; identity; reflective practice; South Africa

Introduction

This article is drawn from a research project that focused on student resistance to teaching about the apartheid past and issues of 'race' [1] in a first year English studies course at a predominantly Afrikaans and 'white' university in South Africa (McKinney, 2003). The study aimed to explore the ways in which the students and the teacher engaged with a form of critical pedagogy moment-by-moment in the classroom. I was concerned not only to identify and understand moments of resistance as these occurred, but also to attempt to engage with and ultimately to intervene in these. While I have usually focused on the students' responses and discourse in writing about this project (e.g. McKinney, 2004a,b), in this article I turn the analytical

spotlight onto myself, analysing the way in which my own multiple and sometimes contradictory identity positions as an educator play themselves out. I reflect on the experience of researching my own teaching practice in this course and examine some of the tensions involved in conducting practitioner-research within a critical pedagogy framework. I draw on Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1985; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1989, 2001) in justifying teaching, which aims at social justice within a post-apartheid context. In analysing the students' and my own responses to such teaching, I use post-structuralist approaches to identity and difference (Hall, 1992, 1996; Weedon, 1997), examining my role in classroom dialogue, and showing how I can be seen performing and juggling different aspects of my identity as a teacher. In particular, I explore the tensions between my preferred 'democratic' teaching style, and my moral or ethical views. I argue that this tension creates a dilemma for teaching within critical pedagogy, which is not easily resolvable.

In an article entitled 'Underground Discourses', Rosenberg (1997) describes herself as 'speaking as a white teacher educator ... about what it means to raise issues of race and racism in teaching and learning with pre-service teachers in a predominantly white teacher education program' (p. 79). She writes about the 'general discomfort with the topic of difference' and argues that while university teachers in her department are often encouraged informally to explore these issues, 'there is no system of support in place for those of us who raise these issues with students' (p. 81). Rosenberg points out that because of this, 'discussions about our pedagogies and curriculum often take the form of subversive or "underground" conversations that take place in the stairwells, in parking lots, or in social meetings often held outside of the department' (1997, p. 81). I identified strongly with both the 'general discomfort' and the lack of institutional support that Rosenberg writes about here. Teachers may discuss such difficulties informally amongst themselves. Yet research discussing student resistance to critical pedagogy, for example, often focuses more on the students than on the role and experience of the teacher in the pedagogic process (Britzman et al, 1991; Janks, 2001, 2002). Where the role of the teacher is considered, there is little detailed analysis of his/her behaviour and contribution to classroom interaction and dialogue (Ellsworth, 1989; Weiler, 1991; Gillespie et al, 2002). Furthermore, many studies which do focus on the role of the teacher, tend to address more general aspects of pedagogy and beliefs regarding teaching and learning, rather than the specific dilemmas arising from a critical pedagogy approach (e.g. Britzman, 1992; Ropers-Huilman, 1997; Day, 1998; Stanulis et al, 2002). In her critique of Freirean 'liberatory pedagogy' from a feminist perspective, Weiler points to 'the need to make conscious the subject positions not only of students but of teachers as well' (1991, p. 462), and her own study of feminist teachers is a good example of this (Weiler, 1988). I hope that this paper can contribute to discussions on making the teacher more visible and developing our understanding of the actual classroom experience of critical pedagogy.

In research on the different 'selves' of teachers, Day (1998) writes about one particular high school English teacher with whom he collaborated in Action Research. Together they identified three competing selves of the teacher that were simultaneously being managed, 'the 'educative', 'ideological' and 'personal''(Day, 1998, p. 258). Day points out that:

> there was a tension between [the teacher's] '*educative*' self, his informed views as a professional teacher in which he wanted to encourage 'creative processes' whilst 'giving students the basic tools or skills of written expression' his '*ideological*' or '*emancipatory*' self based on his espoused values that students should acquire through him a knowledge of content selected for its social relevance; and his '*personal*' self, his teaching and learning dispositions which were themselves complicated by his need for control. (1998, p. 258)

This article explores the tensions between my own preferred 'democratic' teaching style, in which I attempt to give students opportunities to express themselves and to create a supportive environment for student voices to emerge, and my moral or ethical (Day might say 'ideological') views, where I am concerned with promoting particular social values informed by principles such as anti-racism and anti-sexism. These are tied both to critical pedagogy, which attempts to make the classroom a more democratic space, as well as my own socio-political context and personal history as a privileged 'white' South African committed to ending the injustices effected by apartheid. The article also aims to contribute to debate on the relationship between reflective practice and action research (cf. McMahon, 1999; Leitch & Day, 2000), drawing attention to some of the limitations in attempting to intervene in or solve problems arising from critical pedagogy in practice. I turn now to a consideration of the notions of reflexivity within the research process, and of reflection and action research as they relate to my study.

Reflexivity, Reflection and Action Research

Writing about reflexivity within the research process of critical ethnography, Anderson (1989) outlines a version of 'critical reflexivity' that goes beyond reflecting on the relationship between theory and data or on the 'effects of the researcher's presence on the data collected' (1989, p. 254). He adds to these reflections on the researcher's biases and 'reflection on the dialectical relationship between structural/historical forces and human agency' (1989, p. 254). Anderson summarises critical reflexivity thus:

> [it] involves a dialectical process among (a) the researcher's constructs, (b) the informants' common sense constructs, (c) the research data, (d) the researcher's ideological biases, and (e) the structural and historical forces that informed the social construction under study. (1989, p. 255)

377

In my own study, I aimed to keep all of these aspects of reflexivity in play. Reflection on my own ideological biases led to the emergence of the research question explored in this article concerning how I as the teacher engaged with the course and led me to explore my own ideological biases in teaching.

Within the tradition of reflective practice in education, Schön's writing on the 'reflective practitioner' remains influential. In analysing classroom dialogue and focusing on my own role within this, I am practicing 'reflection-on-action', that is the retrospective analysis of one's teaching conducted outside of the classroom which is used to generate knowledge from teaching experience (Leitch & Day, 2000). However, examining the moment-by-moment interaction in the classroom through the data analysis process and looking at the way in which I construct the discursive space, gives some access to my 'reflection-in-action', the 'processes of thinking which accompany doing, and which constantly interact with and modify ongoing practice' as Leitch & Day (2000, p. 180) put it. Such analysis of my own discourse also allows me to examine the gap between what I think I do and what I actually do, what Reed et al have succinctly referred to as the difference between teachers' 'espoused and enacted practices' (2002, p. 257).

Reflection is of course central to educational action research, however as McMahon (1999) argues, reflective practice is not synonymous with action research. In referring to action research I am drawing on the well-known approach of Carr & Kemmis (1986) who describe the process as involving teachers in cycles of self-reflection aimed at improving their practice, as well as their understanding thereof. The method which such action research is based on typically involves a number of self-reflective cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting with the explicit aims of improving: practice, understanding of practice, and the situation in which it takes place (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis, 1993). Carr & Kemmis have argued that three conditions are necessary and sufficient for action research:

> Firstly, a project takes as its subject-matter a social practice, regarding it as a form of strategic action susceptible of improvement; secondly, the project proceeds through a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, with each of these activities being systematically and self-critically implemented and interrelated; thirdly the project involves those responsible for the practice in each of the moments of the activity, widening participation in the project gradually to include others affected by the practice, and maintaining collaborative control of the process. (1986, pp. 165-166)

Apart from the third collaborative element (widening participation), Carr & Kemmis's description of action research closely matches my own research process with the 'social practice' being my teaching and the students' responses to it. I did not, however, have control over my curriculum and could only exercise limited choices on course content, but I was able to

exercise choices over how I engaged with the course materials and how I engaged with the students. Action in my context then often concerned how I related to the students, and the micro decisions I made in the classroom in reacting to what they said and wrote.

McMahon (1999) argues that the distinction between action research and reflective practice rests on the *strategic action* undertaken to solve a particular problem in practice. Against such a distinction, my own research seems rather to hover between action research and reflective practice, suggesting that these offer different locations on a continuum of research practice (characterized by clear intervention on one end and no intervention on the other). First, the process of identifying problems that is key to reflective practice is not necessarily immediate. Analysing my own positioning enabled the differences between my reflection on practice immediately after teaching and reflection developed after a detailed analysis of classroom interaction as part of the research process to surface. Secondly, one of the dilemmas I explore through the data in this article is that problems identified through reflective practice are often not successfully resolved through strategic action – related to this is the notion that the identification of a problem within practice can itself rest on one's ideological biases. This assertion is in step with Leitch & Day's challenge to the 'rational, cognitive models of reflection that are implicit in much of the action research literature' (2000, p. 179). It draws attention to the role of emotions in teaching, and illustrates some of the complexity in attempting to effect change both on the part of students and teachers.

Research Context

The project was conducted in 2001 at a university that can be described as a privileged institution historically linked to 'white', Afrikaans culture. At the time of my fieldwork, it still had a large majority of 'white' students, who mostly spoke Afrikaans as a first language, but with an increasing number of English first language students and a minority of 'black' students (among these, an even smaller minority of 'black' African students).[2] I researched my practice teaching a group of 17 first-year undergraduate students, all but two of whom were 'white' and most of whom were Afrikaans first language speakers. I taught two South African literature courses in a tutorial (small class) programme, which were part of the general English studies curriculum followed by all first year students: South African short stories and South African poetry. For the most part, I followed the same syllabus of short stories and poetry as other tutors, but in some classes I had the opportunity to design my own content. At the same time as they were studying South African literature, students also completed two modules taught through large group lectures: one on persuasive language in advertising and another on introductory sociolinguistics. I collected data by video recording my tutorial classes (later transcribing significant moments from these), keeping a teaching journal, which included field notes, and

379

collecting students' journal writing and more formal written assignments completed during the course.

In my teaching of the South African literature, I aimed at a critical analysis of the social issues and representations of South Africa raised in the texts as well as of the socially constructed nature of students' reading responses. Of course, dealing with social inequality in South Africa inevitably means dealing with the oppressive apartheid past and its continuing effect in the present. However, many of my students, although not all, found it difficult at times to deal with the apartheid past as represented in the South African literature prescribed.

Beyond Binaries: working with critical pedagogy and post-structuralism

My approach was informed by critical pedagogy, and in particular, critical literacy. In its application to the classroom, theorists of critical pedagogy often refer to the development of critical literacy which relies on the Freirean idea of reading the world though reading the word (Freire & Macedo, 1987). In Giroux's words, critical literacy offers 'the opportunity for students to interrogate how knowledge is constituted as both a historical and social construction' and should provide them with the 'knowledge and skills necessary for them to understand and analyse their own historically constructed voices and experiences as part of a project of self and social empowerment' (Giroux, 1989, pp. 33-34). The empowerment project draws attention to the expected participants in critical pedagogy: those who are marginalized or oppressed. However, in working with relatively privileged and predominantly 'white' students, I am arguing for the need for change on the part of the privileged. Particularly in the post-apartheid context, true social change is dependent on the re-education of the privileged, as well as the disempowered. Writing about the development of critical literacy in a mainstream, middle-class Australian school, Morgan (1997) raises the question:

> Freire and others ... have modelled approaches to pedagogy for the dispossessed. But if there is to be significant social and political change, do we not also need to think through what might be a most effective critical literacy project for privileged students like these? (p. 71)

In fact, while Freire's pedagogy is aimed at the oppressed, he acknowledges that both oppressed and oppressors are dehumanised and in need of change:

> [d]ehumanisation, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more fully human. (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 26)

We also need to be cautious in the binary division of oppressed and oppressors; for example while 'black' students suffered gross deprivations under Bantu education, 'white' students were differently disadvantaged (although, of course, not to the same degree) through their exposure to the damaging system of 'Christian National Education', which stifled critique and promoted obedience to apartheid ideology. The students in my study can also be seen as part of the first post-apartheid generation being only 7-8 years of age upon Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1990.

In analysing the students' and my own responses, I focus on the identity work that we are doing, drawing on a feminist post-structuralist approach (cf. Weedon, 1997; Lather, 1991), as well as the work of Stuart Hall. In so doing, I reject a binary division between critical approaches that presuppose a fully rational, unitary subject and extreme postmodern views of a deeply fragmented and irrational subject. The feminist approach illustrates how post-structuralism can be combined with emancipatory ideals. As Lather argues:

> poststructuralism helps us ask questions about what we have
> not thought to think, about what is most densely invested in our
> discourses/practices, about what has been muted, repressed,
> unheard in our [my] liberatory efforts. It helps us to both define
> the politics implicit in our critical practices and move toward
> understanding. (1991, p. 59)

Elsewhere, I argue that the students' resistant responses are tied to the undesirable ways they feel interpellated by the texts under study and that they resist such representations because these contradict that aspect of their identities that they attempt to construct for themselves as new, post-apartheid South Africans (McKinney, 2003, 2004a).

Data Analysis: ethical dilemmas raised in classroom talk

Barely three weeks into teaching the course, I realised the tremendous personal impact that the teaching was having on me and the extent of my emotional involvement in the process. My teaching diary was filled with emotional responses where I described my feelings after class as 'exhausted and intimidated' (tutorial 1) 'shocked' (tutorial 3) 'completely out of control' and 'helpless' (tutorial 7), and sometimes as having 'enjoyed the class' and feeling 'light hearted' for a change (tutorial 9). Clearly, these responses were powerful and an important indicator of, as well as influence on, how I evaluated success and failure in my teaching and ultimately what I did and said in the classroom. I thus began to consider the questions of what I had invested in the teaching and learning process, and to what extent my desire for and specific conception of success in the classroom is bound up with who I am and how I perceive my role as teacher. In answering these questions, I began to focus on how I constructed the discursive space in the classroom – and analysed my own role in the dialogue.

Teacher Talk

Interaction in classroom talk often follows a pattern identified by Sinclair & Coulthard (1975) as Initiation (on the part of the teacher); Response (from the students) and Feedback (from the teacher) – IRF. This IRF pattern ensures that the teacher typically speaks on every alternate turn thus controlling the dialogue in classrooms. A fictional example of this would be:

> *Teacher*: How do you think the character feels at this moment? [I]
> *Student*: I think she's struggling to come to terms with her
> position [R]
> *Teacher*: Ok, Ilse thinks she's struggling, why might that be?
> [F + I]

Analysis of my classroom data revealed that my typical pattern in feedback (and follow-up initiation) is to affirm, reformulate/summarise or simply repeat the student's response, and offer a further probing question that moves the discussion in the direction I desire, as in the example above. In analysing my own discourse then, I began to look for the moments where I deviated from this typical pattern, e.g. withholding feedback altogether, or withholding affirmation and moving directly into a challenging question, Reflecting on my teaching practice as well as analysing my own discourse made me aware of how strongly non-confrontational my teaching style was, aiming to create a supportive and democratic space in which all students would feel comfortable to contribute and where the teacher's position is not privileged (as encouraged within the democratic teaching approach of critical pedagogy). With this understanding, it is not surprising that withholding affirmation and challenging students created a great deal of anxiety for me.

Feeling 'completely out of control': tutorial 7

In the third short story class of the year, a heated discussion about why students had to study South African literature developed among a group of students, while the class was engaged in small group work. On reaching this group, I was told that they were not discussing the set questions as they were arguing about why it was necessary to study South African literature. It is significant that students were working on the story 'The Toilet' by Gcina Mhlope. The story is partly autobiographical dealing with Mhlope's development as a writer under oppressive circumstances in apartheid South Africa. In particular, the story caricatures the 'Maid/Madam' (domestic worker/employer) relationship and portrays the 'white' 'madam' particularly scathingly. The story also represents the stark contrast between the luxurious living conditions of the 'white' employer and the vastly inadequate living conditions of the domestic worker. In analysing the students' discourses in this moment of resistance elsewhere (McKinney, 2004a), I argue that some felt uncomfortably interpellated by the undesirable identity of 'white' oppressor, which is represented in Mhlope's

story and that, for some students, their sense of identities as 'new' South Africans conflicted with the way they felt interpellated as 'white' oppressors by the story.

I experienced a great deal of anxiety during this discussion, leaving the class with my heart pounding and a deep sense of frustration, disappointment and failure, which I recorded and reflected on in my teaching diary. However, watching the video recording of the class 2 months after teaching it, I was surprised at the level of anxiety I had expressed and which I still well remembered experiencing. Somehow this did not seem to be in proportion with what was taking place in the class I was watching on the video. What then provoked such a strong reaction from me? I would argue that my anxiety was a direct result of the conflicting identity work which I was doing in the discussion, balancing my role as the 'democratic' or 'fair' teacher who is open to a number of views, with my moral or ethical position, which judges particular views as unacceptable. I analyse an extract from this class discussion below:

Data Extract from tutorial 7 12/03/01

(1) *CM*: no, quite, I mean that's quite true. But I think that um, what I'm trying to say a little bit it's also, isn't it also about how we read it, and I'm including myself here as well, I'm not saying how you're reading it. That because we're sensitive to those particular issues we see a story like this as being mainly about apartheid rather than the development of a writer ... [Riana nods] [3] that somehow uh what we bring to the story prevents us from reading it in different ways? Maybe?

Lindy: I think to a certain extent it is what we bring to the story but to a certain extent it's what others want us to bring to the story

(2) *CM*: OK, others being?

Lindy: as in our teachers at school or lecturers or whatever they, they keep harping on about racial issues and [unclear]

(3) *CM*: so that, in other words, the way that the stories are taught sometimes pushes those issues, *ja* [4]

[André raises hand] Yes.

André: I just feel like, like in America, they, those guys sent wagons of whiskey off into the Indian tribes and killed them off like thieves

(4) *CM*: *Ja*, so they did hideous things is the point you're making

André: They did like hideous things, much more hideous than

(5) *CM*: *Ja*

André: than what the apartheid government ever did

(6) *CM*: well, I think that's difficult to say. I don't think we should judge in terms of//

//people doing worse//

> *André*:// well, we never,// OK, not we the apartheid government
> never sent in a whole truck load of SA Breweries beer into Soweto
> and then when all the guys were slaughtered just went in and
> shot them all and that's exactly what the Americans did. But
> they don't teach their children you know all that and push that
> into their faces all the time
> (7) *CM*: But isn't that wrong perhaps?
> André: No
> (8) *CM*: isn't that something we criticise America for; the fact that
> they don't address these issues?
> *André*: well, everybody knows about it, but it's in the past, it's
> like way in the past
> (9) *CM*: but does everybody know about it? I don't know very
> much about it and I'm a fairly educated person
> *André*: Ja, but you're not American
> (10) *CM*: sure
> *André*: American kids learn all about what they, learn about the
> fight against the Indians, they learn about the confederates
> (11) *CM*: Uhmm
> [Head of department enters room with message about a new
> tutorial group]
> *Riana*: I just want to say about the issues. I don't think we
> shouldn't address them, I just wonder if we can get over it at
> some stage?
>
> [Numbers in brackets refer to my speaking turns; // indicates
> overlapping speaking turn]

My first turn in the extract above shows my attempt to explain their resistance to studying South African literature to the students. I am attempting to put forward the argument that students interpret the stories they have read as being 'all about apartheid' because of their own sensitivity to this issue, but carefully include myself with the pronoun 'we' so as not to accuse the students or position them as different from myself. Lindy then offers a different interpretation from mine and in my second turn I affirm her point and ask her to expand on it (a fairly typical response from me). My turn 3 is again typical: I reformulate Lindy's point (implicitly accepting it) and then affirm it with my 'Ja'. At this point I am also wondering whether 'they' in Lindy's '... lecturers or whatever *they*, *they* keep harping on about racial issues' includes me and this puts me in a particularly difficult position later in the extract. Not surprisingly, I am sensitive to being positioned with the 'they' that Lindy talks about precisely because this conflicts with the identity of 'fair teacher' (the one who is unbiased and open) that I am continually constructing. Such an undesirable interpellation causes anxiety for me, just as the perceived positioning alongside the 'white'

'madam' in Mhlope's story, 'The Toilet', causes anxiety for some of my students.

On the face of it, I appear to continue with my affirming and reformulating strategy in responding to André in my turn 4, but the precise manner in which I reformulate, or rather appear to reformulate, André's point shows that I have a very specific agenda in this turn. Listening to André speak about his interpretation of events in North America, I became increasingly nervous about where he was heading in his argument and suspected that he was about to either attempt to justify or to minimise apartheid atrocities. With this in mind, my turn 4 was an attempt at damage control: I hoped to cut André's point short and to get him to state it more quickly. My reformulation also clearly shows my perspective on the events that he is relating as 'hideous things'. However, André merely uses my phrasing in the continuation of the argument that I had predicted and feared he was about to make. Ironically my 'ja' in turn 5 is again an attempt to hurry him up, rather than an affirmation, yet in the end I cannot prevent the point André wants to make and that I definitely do not want voiced in my classroom: that apartheid atrocities were much less hideous than what happened to Native Americans in North America. It is clear by my turn 6 that there is no way I can affirm André's point. I thus face a real dilemma in reconciling my moral position (and that which I want promoted in the classroom), which views apartheid as a 'hideous' crime against humanity, with my preferred democratic teaching style, which acknowledges that it is not always easy for students to take the floor in the university classroom and that supports them in doing so.

In the next four turns (6-9) I deviate from my typical affirm, reformulate or probe further strategy in an explicit attempt to challenge and refute André's point of view. However, the way in which I do this is informed by my non-confrontational teaching style and is thus still fairly tentative. For example, in turn 6, my challenge is hedged '*I think* that's difficult to say … *I don't think* we should judge …'. Thus, while I clearly cannot affirm André's point of view, my preferred identity as the fair teacher still prevents me from challenging him more strongly. In my turns 7-9 I use questions (an even less direct strategy than my hedged statements in turn 6 and hedging the question itself with 'perhaps' in 7) to continue to challenge André's points and to attempt to get him to see the weaknesses (from my perspective anyway) in his argument, but with little success. It would have been interesting to see what I might have said in my turn 11 if I were not interrupted by the head of the department coming in, as in the turn before mine André completely contradicts his earlier point that 'they [Americans] don't teach their children all of that' by saying 'American kids learn all about what they, learn about the fight against the Indians.' His own quick change of phrasing from 'learn all about what they [did to the Indians?]' to 'the fight against the Indians' shows that he might even be becoming aware of the contradiction in the point he is now making. I am stopped short after a disapproving 'Uhmm', but I cannot be sure that I would have directly exposed André's contradiction here were I given the opportunity. I certainly

do not return to his point when the class resumes, but by then another student, Riana, had already come in with a different point of her own, shifting the discussion away from André's line of argument, and at the same time distancing her own resistance from his.

At the time I felt that I had little success in challenging André (I cannot know the effect of my responses on the rest of the students who remained silent in this exchange) and with no audible allies, I felt very much as if I were taking up an oppositional stance towards the class; it was me against 'them'. I was also acutely aware of Lindy's earlier comment about teachers who 'keep harping on about racial issues' and, in challenging André's argument, I felt trapped into the very position which Lindy viewed as illegitimate. Whether or not Lindy intended to include me in her comment, I did feel positioned in this way and this increased my anxiety in handling the dilemma. In my view, being positioned as 'one of those' would exacerbate the very problem of studying South African literature the students were raising. At the same time, I felt anxious that the class had been exposed to a morally repugnant view, which I had not adequately challenged and thus ultimately had not protected them from. My own moral identity as a 'white' South African who was anti-apartheid was also at stake here and I felt it threatened by this interaction. I am arguing, then, that in this exchange I had a lot to lose in performing and juggling different aspects of my identity, and it was this that caused me such high levels of anxiety and distress, rather than a loss of control of the class, which indeed is not reflected on the video recording. Yet the dilemma cannot be reduced to my identity work. It should also be explained in terms of the inherent tensions in critical pedagogy, which attempts to turn a fundamentally undemocratic space (the classroom) into a more democratic one, while at the same time promoting particular egalitarian values and a social justice agenda. This tension is also not merely a result of working with privileged students. On the one hand, it must be acknowledged that the positions of oppressor and oppressed are multiple such that one can be positioned as both oppressed and oppressor (e.g. in the intersections of 'race' and gender), but on the other it is not only the privileged who can tell uncomfortable and unwelcome stories.

In a discussion of some of the difficulties involved in her experience of interviewing 'white' women about 'race', Frankenberg (1993) writes about one moment where she 'very carefully construct[ed] the question and the discursive space' in an interview with a 'self-styled conservative [woman] in her fifties' in order to discuss the racial makeup of the interviewee's friendship group in a non-threatening way (1993, pp. 38-39). In analysing a transcript from a different interview, Frankenberg describes another experience where she felt she colluded to keep a particular racist memory repressed. She describes herself here:

> Reading this transcript, removed from the interview, I can see
> myself working from within the discourse I am seeking to
> challenge, maintaining one of the silences I am setting out to
> break. (1993, pp. 40-41)

Reading Frankenberg's work, it strikes me how similar some of the ethical dilemmas are in teaching as in interviewing – there are similar issues of unequal power relations, potential for both manipulation and unethical collusion with interviewees, but in the case of teaching, the situation is exacerbated as the presence of an audience in the other students increases the teachers' ethical responsibility. While colluding (even inadvertently) with an interviewee to keep the dialogue going, of course, presents ethical dilemmas for the interviewer, how much more is this so in classroom dialogue? Yet, just as Frankenberg points out of interviewing, so much of teaching is about the careful construction of questions and ultimately of a discursive space that is conducive to open dialogue and learning. However, a discursive space that is supportive and non-threatening is not necessarily one that will challenge and encourage shifts in perspectives. While constructing such a discursive space is a priority and a major part of my agenda while performing the 'fair teacher', this becomes more difficult when the teacher's moral values and those that we seek to promote are in conflict with those expressed by a student in the classroom.

Conclusion

I have argued in this article that juggling the different demands of teaching, as well as my different identities as a 'fair', democratic teacher, and promoter of particular moral and ethical values has a powerful effect on how I engaged with the process of teaching literature that deals with the apartheid past and its continuing legacy. The different aspects of my identity lead me to affirm particular views and to challenge, or sometimes fail to challenge, others. Juggling these often contradictory aspects of my identity caused me considerable anxiety and often constrained the way in which I reacted to the resistance of some students. Both the students' positioning of me and our shared apartheid history often prohibited me from challenging students further.

The feminist post-structuralist view of identity as multiple, and often contradictory, helps me to make sense of this experience. To some extent, the tensions and resulting anxiety produced through my teaching can be explained in terms of inherent tensions in the critical pedagogy approach, which attempts to turn a fundamentally undemocratic space (the classroom) into a more democratic one, while at the same time promoting particular egalitarian values. However, such tensions are also produced by my own investments in particular subject positions, and my own desires to be both similar to and different from my students. Performing different aspects of my identity at different moments in the classroom, as well as my beliefs about what kind of a teacher I am and want to be, can be as much a source of tension as the problems in the theoretical approach to pedagogy on which I draw. Furthermore, my beliefs about what kind of teacher I am and should be are not exclusively informed by critical pedagogy, but are also influenced by how I see myself as a privileged, 'white' South African of a particular generation and how I see my role as such. Ironically, I too often feel

uncomfortably, undesirably positioned in the classroom, although this emanates more from some of the students than from the English Studies course that deals with the apartheid past. Of course, I was acutely aware of this discomfort at the time and reflected on what had taken place in the class, both immediately after it as I wrote in my teaching journal, and in the days that followed.

However, such reflection-on-action as recorded in my teaching diary could not lead me to the conclusions I have drawn in this paper. It was rather the close analysis of the moment-by-moment interaction in the classroom some time after teaching the class that enabled me to develop a better understanding of the source of my anxiety and discomfort. One could describe this understanding as having developed through a process of:

- reflection-in-action, which took place during the class, followed by reflection-on-action, which took place immediately afterwards and in the days that followed;
- then an *analysis* of reflection-on-action, after I had watched the video recording of the class some time later, which took me back into an *analysis* of reflection-in-action through an examination of the transcripts of classroom interaction.

Such a process of reflection seems to draw together the reflexivity encouraged in critical ethnography with the reflection encouraged within action research, suggesting that the kind of reflection that enables one to engage in strategic action, or to intervene in one's practice is both immediate and ongoing, as well as complex and multi-layered. This process deepened the benefits of reflective practice for me enormously and also reminds us that problems in teaching are frequently not easy to resolve, even through a careful action research enquiry. While this may be an obvious point to make, strategic action as the distinctive aspect of action research seems to suggest that problems, once identified, are usually amenable to solutions. Being more aware of the possible contradictions and tensions arising from my approach, and specifically of how I construct the discursive space in the classroom has also made me less anxious and more able to keep my head in dealing with conflict. However, it is still not easy to achieve the right balance between support and challenge knowing that completely silencing oppositional views will not provide opportunities for the kind of dialogue which could encourage shifts in thinking.

In discussing the role of the teacher, Freire (1997) writes that:

> [t]he fundamental task of the mentor [teacher] is a liberatory
> task. It is not to encourage the mentor's goals and aspirations
> and dreams to be reproduced in the mentees, the students, but
> to give rise to the possibility that the students *become the owners*
> *of their own history*. This is how I understand the need that
> teachers have to transcend their merely instructive task and to
> assume the ethical posture of a mentor who truly believes in the

total autonomy, freedom and development of those he or she
mentors. (p. 324, my emphasis)

Clearly, I do not view my own task in the classroom as 'merely instructive.' I want to create the kind of discursive space that is non-threatening and supportive of students' expressing their views, while at the same time attempting to encourage shifts in perspectives. My desire to be open and unbiased, the fair teacher and encouraging of multiple perspectives derives from such views on critical pedagogy which seek to address power imbalances in the classroom, though, ultimately, the institutional nature of the university environment ensures that these will remain. I cannot, however, deny that my desire is to encourage a shift in perspectives and that such a shift is based on particular values that I attempt to promote. In this case, these are based on the values of anti-racism and anti-sexism, which are espoused in South African policy on higher education and which are enshrined in the country's constitution. Under these circumstances, then, I cannot pretend that I have no desire 'to encourage' my own (as the mentor's) 'goals' in the classroom. It is precisely in enabling students to become 'the owners of their own history' that I find my greatest challenge. Indeed, owning our history is both an individual and a collective task for my students' generation and my own, though the nature of that history makes this a particularly difficult one.

Correspondence

Dr Carolyn McKinney, Applied English Language Studies,
School of Literature and Language Studies, Faculty of Humanities,
University of Witwatersrand, Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050, South Africa
(cmckinney@languages.wits.ac.za).

Notes

[1] I signal my understanding of 'race' as a social construct by using quotation marks for the term, as well as for colour terms, such as 'black' and 'white'.

[2] This predominance of 'white' students is unusual in South Africa where universities generally have a minimum of 50% 'black' students enrolled.

[3] I use pseudonyms to name the students. Lindy is an English first language speaker; Riana and André are Afrikaans first language speakers.

[4] *Ja* is Afrikaans for yes; also used in South African English.

References

Anderson, G.L. (1989) Critical Ethnography in Education: origins, current status, and new directions, *Review of Educational Research*, 59, pp. 249-270.

Britzman, D. (1992) The Terrible Problem of Knowing Thyself: toward a poststructuralist account of teacher identity, *Journal of Curriculum Theorising*, 9, pp. 23-46.

Britzman, D., Santiago-Valles, K.A., Jiménez-Muñoz, G.M. & Lamash, L.M. (1991) Dusting off the Erasures: race, gender and pedagogy, *Education and Society*, 9, pp. 88-99.

Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming Critical: education, knowledge and action research*. London: Falmer Press.

Day, C. (1998) Working with the Different Selves of Teachers: beyond comfortable collaboration, *Educational Action Research*, 6, pp. 255-273.

Ellsworth, E. (1989) Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy, *Harvard Educational Review*, 59, pp. 297-324.

Frankenberg, R. (1993) *White Woman, Race Matters: the social construction of whiteness*. London: Routledge.

Freire, P. (1970/1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, revised edn. London: Penguin.

Freire, P. (1985) *The Politics of Education: culture, power and liberation*. Westport: Bergin & Garvey.

Freire, P. (1997) A Response, in P. Freire, with J.W. Fraser, D. Macedo, T. McKinnin and W.T. Stokes (Eds) *Mentoring the Mentor: a critical dialogue with Paulo Freire*, vol. 60, Counterpoints Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education Series. New York: Peter Lang.

Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1987) *Literacy: reading the word and the world*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Gillespie, D., Ashbaugh, L. & DeFiore, D. (2002) White Women Teaching White Women about White Privilege, Race Cognizance and Social Action: toward a pedagogical pragmatics, *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 5, pp. 237-253.

Giroux, H. (1989) *Schooling for Democracy*. London: Routledge.

Giroux, H. (2001) *Theory and Resistance in Education: towards a pedagogy for the opposition*, revised edn. Westport: Bergin & Garvey.

Hall, S. (1992) The Question of Cultural Identity, in S. Hall, D. Held & T. McGrew (Eds) *Modernity and its Futures*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hall, S. (1996) Introduction: who needs identity? in S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage.

Janks, H. (2001) Identity and Conflict in the Critical Literacy Classroom, in B. Comber & A. Simpson (Eds) *Negotiating Critical Literacies in Classrooms*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Janks, H. (2002) Critical Literacy: beyond reason, *Australian Educational Researcher*, 29, pp. 7-26.

Kemmis, S. (1993) Action Research, in M. Hammersley (Ed.) *Educational Research: current issues*. London: Paul Chapman.

Lather, P. (1991) *Getting Smart: feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern.* New York: Routledge.

Leitch, R. & Day, C. (2000) Action Research and Reflective Practice: towards a holistic view, *Educational Action Research*, 8, pp. 179-193.

McKinney, C. (2003) Educating 'Constructively Critical Citizens'? Exploring Student Responses to the Apartheid Past in a South African Undergraduate English Studies Course. PhD thesis, Institute of Education, University of London.

McKinney, C. (2004a) 'A Little Hard Piece of Grass in Your Shoe': understanding student resistance to critical literacy in post-apartheid South Africa, *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 22, pp. 63-73.

McKinney, C. (2004b) 'It's Just a Story': 'white' students' difficulties in reading the apartheid past, *Perspectives in Education*, 22, pp. 37-45.

McMahon, T. (1999) Is Reflective Practice Synonymous with Action Research, *Educational Action Research*, 7, pp. 163-169.

Morgan, W. (1997) *Critical Literacy in the Classroom – the art of the possible.* London: Routledge.

Reed, Y., Davis, H. & Nyabanyaba, T. (2002) Investigating Teachers' 'Take-up' of Reflective Practice from an In-service Professional Development Teacher Education Programme in South Africa, *Educational Action Research*, 10, pp. 253-273.

Rosenberg, P. (1997) Underground Discourses: exploring whiteness in teacher education, in M. Fine, L. Weis, L.C. Powell & L. Mun Wong (Eds) *Off White: readings on race, power and society.* New York: Routledge.

Ropers-Huilman, B. (1997) Constructing Feminist Teachers: complexities of identity, *Gender and Education*, 9, pp. 327-343.

Sinclair, J.M. & Coulthard, R.M. (1975) *Towards an Analysis of Discourse: the English used by teachers and pupils.* London: Oxford University Press.

Stanulis, R.N., Campbell, P.E. & Hicks, J. (2002) Finding Her Way: a beginning teacher's story of learning to honour her own voice in teaching, *Educational Action Research*, 10, pp. 45-65.

Weedon, C. (1997) *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist theory.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Weiler, K. (1988) *Women Teaching for Change: gender, class and power.* New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Weiler, K. (1991) Freire and a Feminist Pedagogy of Difference, *Harvard Educational Review*, 61, pp. 449-474.

392