

REDDY, SARAS N. Ph.D. Ladson-Billings' Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is not Measuring up - and that's exactly as it should be! A Philosophical Reading of the Problem of Static ways of Thinking about Culture in our Epoch of Calculative, Scientific Thinking. (2023)
Directed by Dr. Glenn Hudak. 126 pp.

Since 1989 one of the undisputed leaders in the field of culturally meaningful pedagogy, Gloria Ladson-Billings, has persistently reminded educators about one core idea - any practice that is committed to meaningful engagement with cultural identity should conceive of culture as being fluid. Yet we are recalcitrant in changing how we think about culture. We continue to practice under the assumption that culture can be easily categorized, fully known, preserved, and then seamlessly transmitted from teacher to student, or vice versa. In 2014, Ladson-Billings expressed her dissatisfaction with our *static conception* and superficial *notions* which results in the fluidity and variety within cultural groups being lost. If it is indeed our conception of culture that renders it stagnant, should we not then give this problem of a fixed cultural conception of culture a philosophical reading that explores how different modes of thinking can render culture static? To explore different modes of thinking, I converse with four philosophers: Martin Heidegger, a German, who thinks away from the classical western, calculative ways of his time offers us meditative thinking. Calvin Warren, an Afro-pessimist and Marimba Ani, an Afro-centrist open a space for thinking informed by spirit. Carl Mika, a Māori scholar invites us to think speculatively. These scholars all offer us different ways of thinking about the paradox of the human condition - our pre-ontological propensity for openness and fluidity, and our accompanying ontological anxiety that forecloses on this openness. Through close textual analysis, we explore what's at stake for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in the face of this paradox.

LADSON-BILLINGS' CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY IS
NOT MEASURING UP - AND THAT'S EXACTLY AS IT SHOULD
BE! A PHILOSOPHICAL READING OF THE PROBLEM OF
STATIC WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT CULTURE
IN OUR EPOCH OF CALCULATIVE,
SCIENTIFIC THINKING

by

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A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro

2023

Approved by

Dr. Glenn Hudak
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DEDICATION

“You are the wing beneath my wings,
Sometimes the force of a gale,
Sometimes the whisper of a breeze”

This work is dedicated to those who have walked my journeys beside me.

My parents, Naga Reddy and Doorgamah Reddy always insisted on the power of literacy and critical thought. My husband, Thavan Moodley, drove me to classes when I was too tired to travel on my own and drove me to persevere when I was too tired to type another word. My daughter, Denisha Moodley, modeled what passion, work ethic and stamina could achieve, and left me with no option but to follow her lead. My son-in-law, Durell Spell quietly and sometimes not so quietly, but always with a sense of humor, never allowed me to give up. My siblings and their spouses Morgan, Chisane, Sally and Timmy took on more responsibility than they should have, which gave me the space to do what I needed to do. My nieces and nephew, Nikaela, Kiana, Taiona and Tiam and my granddaughter, Kaia - I could never let you down, so I kept on keeping on.

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July 14, 2023

Date of Acceptance by Committee

May 30, 2023

Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has taken much longer to complete than it normally would have. I am thankful to my professors who have stayed the course with me. I am thankful to Dr. Hudak, for giving me the space to work things out for myself, for gently pushing when I lost steam and for holding my feet to the fire. I am thankful to Dr. Bouchard and Dr. Villaverde who broadened my thinking. I am also thankful to Dr. Kathleen Edwards and the writing communities that she inspired. Your guidance made all the difference.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION, OR OPENING A SPACE FOR CONVERSATION

A Glimpse into my Experiences

Vignette 1

Jasmin, classified as Hispanic, is in study hall when she suddenly bursts out in a DaBaby rap. The African American teacher reprimands her for disturbing, then says by way of encouraging her to have cultural pride: “Why are you trying to be Black? At least spit some Chicana lyrics. Don’t think I don’t hear you saying ‘Bruh this and Bruh that’ in the hallways as if you are Black. Stay true to who you are...Brown Pride!”

Vignette 2

In the wake of multiple police shootings of African Americans, the administration of a school holds sessions on reacting to police stops. “Our priority,” students are told “is to get home safely...don’t worry about being right, worry about staying alive. You’re not going to get justice on your own. Get home and let an adult advocate on your behalf.” During simulations of police stops, students are taught what to say, what tone to use, how to stand, how to control facial expressions and body gestures. A somber mood prevails as everyone confronts the precariousness of life for African Americans.

Vignette 3

Adrian identifies as African American. He is new to a school that is predominantly White in staff and student populations. One of the few teachers of color hears him complain about an assignment that requires writing a letter of appreciation to the police. “I’m with Kaepernick,” he says. “I got nothing to appreciate the police for.” The teacher engages in a conversation about his feelings and when he says that he’s had it with White people, the teacher reminds him that Colin Kaepernick’s adoptive parents are white, that they support his stance, and that Kaepernick’s

protest is against the system of racism. Student and Teacher discuss racism as a system at some length. A few days later, the teacher is confronted by the irate African American parent who, in a profanity laced tirade asks, “Why bring race into the conversation? What kind of a teacher are you to let my son believe he will be faced with racism? What hope is he going to have if he thinks that the system is against him? You should be telling him that he can succeed just like everyone else. Don’t make him a victim.”

Vignette 4

It’s parent-teacher night. A White parent walks up to an immigrant teacher of color and expresses anger about a poetry lesson in which the speaker in the poem expresses pride in the cultural and political meanings of her Ethiopian name. In his mind, the poem is “un-American” as it encourages a pride in her Ethiopian roots, which, he feels, would cause more division and discrimination. “We are all the same,” he declares, “American, not African American, not Mexican American, just American. That’s the only way for everyone to be equal.”

This is a sample of the school related scenarios that I have experienced, either as an observer or as a direct participant. They highlight contradictory views on racial and/or cultural identity. The teacher who yelled at Jasmine conflated race and ethnicity. The National Center for Education Statistics explains that someone who identifies as Hispanic or Latino is “A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.” For all intents and purposes then, Jasmine could easily have been Hispanic (ethnicity) and Black (race), but the teacher saw these as two disparate categories of identification. Vignette two and Vignette three highlight different interpretations of the African American experience, with Adrian’s parent believing that he has the potential for success if he believed that he is operating in a fair socio-political system, while those involved in vignette two

strategize to survive a socio-political system that constantly places their lives in jeopardy. Vignette four echoes the sentiment of Adrian's parent – we are all equal and talking about cultural differences or racial inequities is likely to result in deeper divisions between diverse racial and cultural groups.

While this project will focus on culture and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Ladson-Billings, whose work forms the basis of this study, reminds that culture and race have become inextricably intertwined. She claims that “the present cultural model relies so heavily on race as a sense-making category, even before individuals start to think about their racial identification, culture sends both explicit and implicit messages about race” (2018, p. 3-4), so it is inevitable that race will become a part of the discussion. Since Ladson-Billings work focuses on the educational experiences of African Americans, this study chooses to draw mainly on examples from a similar experience. This study focuses particularly on Ladson-Billings' dissatisfaction with the static way in which Culturally Relevant Pedagogy unfolds in classrooms. She observes that students are exposed mainly to “static images of cultural histories, customs, and traditional ways of being. However, culture is always changing” (2014, p.75). As will be discussed in Chapter 2, she repeatedly calls for a fluid conception of culture that meaningfully addresses the tendency of cultures to change, yet even amongst practitioners who support her framework, pedagogical practices continue to be informed by static notions of culture. She reminds that practices informed by such static notions cannot respond to the needs of young people who have created a culture that is a “mash-up with permeable boundaries,” that has “allowed them to take on a more flexible outlook toward their identity-including a flexible approach to their racial identities” (2020, p. 27). For Ladson-Billings, both culture and race have the potential for being conceived of as being fluid, though her work focuses mainly on the fluidity of cultural identities.

Culture: A Pharmakon

Like Ladson-Billings, Qadri Ismail (2015) whose work exposes the colonial labor performed by culture agrees that culture “emerges concatenated with race” (p. 3). He reminds that “culture cannot be understood, in the texts of its emergence, without reference to race; the concepts buttress, reinforce, recite each other” (p. 32). However, while Ladson-Billings frames the fluid nature of culture and race as being desirable (even though she may contradict herself, as discussed in chapter 2), Ismail exposes the Eurocentric deployment of *fluid* cultural categories and *rigid* racial categories in furthering the aims of the colonial project. This study too aligns itself with Ladson-Billings’ call for fluid conceptions of culture and race, but alongside Ismail, this section of the study attempts to think through the complexities of such fluidity.

Ismail makes the claim that before Matthew Arnold’s treatise, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), no one, not even the English knew that they had a culture. How then did culture come to be “Eurocentrism’s most potent signifier of subjectivity?” (p. 7). If culture is so tied to Eurocentrism, could cultural interpellation really bode well for equity? Ladson-Billings insists that Culturally Relevant Pedagogy can and must always open spaces for subjectivity that heightens socio-political consciousness. However, Ismail, describing the experience of the English working class in the 1800’s seems to indicate that cultural interpellation could dilute the socio-political consciousness. In the 1800’s, the English working class began demanding the right to vote. Arnold, as analyzed by Ismail, describes their quest for liberation as “anarchy” since extending franchise to the masses would effectively mean the collapse of feudalism. Arnold, Ismail says, justifies the withholding of the right to vote by framing the working class as being “raw and rough” (Arnold, cited in Ismail, p. 29). But, in comparison to the Irish, their redeeming feature lay in their English blood, their English race. By virtue of their English blood,

nature has made them salvageable. Ismail encapsulates Arnold's thinking with: "Nature itself has formed, produced, ordered the working class with a predisposition towards 'English' ... habits, to 'hate what we hate, love what we love. Culture must work to complete this process, turn, train, potential to perfection" (p. 31). Here we see that culture, rooted in racism, is deployed to facilitate a smooth entry into an already established social configuration. It is highly unlikely that the populace that is trained to "hate what we hate, love what we love" could have the socio-political consciousness or critical consciousness that Ladson-Billings says must "offer thoughtful critique about what they are learning in school and what they are experiencing in the society" (2021b, p. 127). Culture has the potential to detract from the demand for rights and orient them into the idea of what it means to belong to a certain cultural group. Indeed Ladson-Billings (2014) observes that "even when people have demonstrated a more expansive knowledge of culture, few have taken up the sociopolitical dimensions of the work, instead dulling its critical edge or omitting it altogether (p. 77). In today's context, encouraging cultural pride in uncritical ways could easily mimic the dilution of socio-political imperatives, and it could mask the Eurocentric brand of civilization that still entwines the concept of culture with racism.

According to Ismail, Edward Burnett Tylor (1880) in his work *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization* also clearly associates race with the potential for perfection through culture. Tylor classifies human beings into three categories: the savage, the barbarian and the civilized. The savage, who he associates with the African, being closest to nature cannot be interpellated by culture, while the other categories have the potential for refinement through culture. While consolidating France, Germany and England as the leaders of cultural progress (which has come to be associated with national intellect), Tylor concedes that some races of color like the brown Egyptians, the yellow Chinese and the dark-whites did take

the lead with early cultural progress, but “since then the fair whites . . . of France, Germany, and England, have taken their share not meanly though latest in the world’s progress (cited in Ismail, p. 24). His discussion places the African outside the history of civilization, and he justifies their exclusion by referencing a Eurocentric brand of quasi-science that linked brain size to intellectual capacity. Ismail says:

Tylor finds brain capacity a cardinal signifier of race. Assuming intellectual difference, the superiority of the civilized, (Tylor) proceeds to ground it physiologically, scientifically, by measuring, averaging— a mean estimate, indeed— the brain capacity of groups seen as distinct races, thus producing the calculable type, and culture as a scale, a graded system of measure. (p. 25)

Here, Ismail indicts a certain brand of science, used by anthropologists to give credibility to the axiological notions of race and culture. In chapter 2, I work with Calvin Warren to take up further the discussion of scientific, or calculable ways of thinking and the link to anti-black racism. Ismail’s work exposes the Eurocentric deployment of the categories of race and culture and goes further to show how the discourse of progress is rooted in racist notions. For Tylor, the barbarians, positioned as the ancestors of the English desired progress because their brain sizes are bigger, while the African, due to a smaller brain size, remained outside the journey of civilization. The discourse of cultural change, or fluidity seems to be rooted in a discourse of progress which is both informed by and informs racist ways of viewing the world. This aspect of cultural fluidity – that change is progress (and the concomitant racist implications of such fluidity) must be considered in framing cultural fluidity as being desirable.

Ismail also draws on the work of Thomas Babington Macaulay (1972) to further elaborate on the dangers of framing cultural fluidity as something desirable. The civilizing

project of colonialism staged some nations as being civilizable (according to Eurocentric standards), depending on their brain size, but this brand of civilization could happen only with the intervention of an outside source (Europe itself). Thus, the exploitative nature of colonization was masked by a civilizing, “we’ll change you for your benefit” impetus. However, the colonial powers strategically maintained a distinction between empire and colony. To keep this distinction, Ismail explains, colonialism needed “a single concept to capture tastes, morals, opinions and intellect [culture] and another to capture blood and color” (Mathur, 2014, 33.03). He exposes the epistemic violence in the project of developing a middle class of “cultural” interpreters, who would become transformable, changeable, have fluidity enough to give up their own culture to be considered “civilized,” as eurocentrism would have it. This middle-class would model the successes of “Englishness” and encourage transformation of the masses of Indians to English culture. Ismail elaborates:

Macaulay stages human subjectivity as comprising two enmeshed strands: one natural, static, signifying absolute, hierarchical difference between social groups; the other “artificial,” dynamic, also signifying hierarchical difference, but that which colonialism promises to erase, that which the episteme understands as transformable (2015, p. 63)

Clearly, given the socio-political power dynamics that are still at play, both transformable, fluid subjectivity and rigid, immutable identities (which cannot exist sans draconian laws), would be problematic.

Ismail (2013) warns against the celebration of cultural diversity. The very concept, he says, is “Eurocentric, patriarchal, epistemologically incoherent, ethically compromised, politically elitist and most dangerously, often repressive of the very ideals it extols...; crudely put, not a good thing; it cannot, therefore, ground an ethical future” (p. 2). Given the

problematic origins of the notion of culture, it probably should not ground meaningful pedagogy, but given the term's prominence, our "cathecting" (Ismail, p. 222) relationship with culture brings feelings of pride, community, subjectivity and political agency, so practitioners must accept that it is inevitable that culture will remain a key focus in pedagogical practices. At best, practitioners who ground their practices in values of equity and justice must attempt to remain cognizant of these problematics, especially as they attempt to meet the cultural needs of students in a meaningful way. To do this, teachers have to navigate the paradoxical nature of culture – it is a pharmakon - simultaneously poisonous and nourishing.

Ismail (2015) claims that "Eurocentrism saturates culture—intensely, indelibly—at its moment of emergence" (p. 33). This study goes further to describe how Eurocentrism saturates thinking itself, or the Anglo-US episteme as Ismail calls it. While this study takes its cue from Gloria Ladson-Billings' (2014) dissatisfaction with the static ways in which culturally relevant pedagogy unfolds in the classroom, its focus is not entirely on culture itself. Rather, it focuses on the Eurocentric ways of thinking (western metaphysics) that render thinking itself in general (and thinking about culture, in particular) static. Such thinking, steeped in western, colonial scientific ways of knowing seems to lack the openness necessary for orienting to the complexity of paradoxical entities like culture. Ladson-Billings (2003) encapsulates our lack of openness when she says that "we continue to grapple with a cultural logic locked in binaries. It understands dichotomy and opposition and has little room for complexity. It cannot hold two competing thoughts at once and imposes on us a 'regime of truth'..." (p. 7).

The scenarios described at the beginning, the Eurocentric intertwining of race and culture, and the paradoxical nature of culture are somewhat representative of the rugged, paradoxical terrain of most teachers who, like me, place imperatives of social justice and identity

politics at the core of our praxis. For me, these lived experiences of external challenges become somewhat more acute considering my outsider status regarding race and culture in the US

My state issued documents say I am a South African Indian. If this is the most salient aspect of my identity, as global state institutions seem to indicate, then I will always be navigating an outsider status, no matter which community I work and/or live in in the US. Thus far, I have worked in three different, largely homogenous communities in the US: African American, Indigenous (Navajo) and Hispanic. Now, numerous studies (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Egalite & Kisida, 2016; Ouzad, 2014) conclude that students experience lower exclusionary discipline rates in classrooms where students share racial characteristics with their teachers.

These studies remind me that students in such classes of shared teacher-student racial or cultural backgrounds are happier, feel cared for and they feel validated; they communicate more openly; they put forth more effort; they score higher on standardized tests, and they are more likely to aspire for a college degree. So then, if my state prescribed racial and cultural identity can never “match” that of my students, how should my practice be to create optimal, validating, emancipatory pedagogical experiences?

As a cultural outsider to the communities in which I teach, I almost always find that addressing the cultural needs of students is extremely bewildering. The attempts to address their cultural needs, namely their belief systems, human activity, production, and thought (Ladson-Billings, 2014) fills me with trepidation. In my anxiety, I often turn to the prevailing research and literature to guide my practice. It does not take long to realize that Gloria Ladson-Billings is recognized, not only as a teacher and teacher educator, but also as one of the most respected and prolific researchers in education in general, and in education for African American children in particular. In 2022, she was ranked number two in the annual Edu-Scholar Public Influence

Rankings that pays tribute to top education scholars across the nation “who move ideas from academic journals into the national conversation” (UW–Madison’s Ladson-Billings, 2022, para. 1). She is known for heading the national conversation on culturally relevant pedagogy and she is credited with coining the term “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy” (CRP), which she defines as a “pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20). She has worked diligently and passionately to encourage such a pedagogy which is built on three major domains: fostering intellectual growth and academic success, instilling a sociopolitical consciousness, and promoting and maintaining cultural competence. As I sought guidance from her work, I came to the startling realization that after almost 25 years of encouraging pedagogical practices based on culturally relevant principles, Ladson-Billings (2014) expressed dissatisfaction with the way teaching based on these principles seemed to unfold in classroom practice. Given her illustrious career, her vast contribution to education and her long-standing commitment to CRP, it is indeed significant that her dissatisfaction ran so deep that it led to her calling for a shift from CRP to Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) as described by Django Paris (2012). A major reason for Ladson-Billings’ dissatisfaction, which becomes a signpost for this study, is what she calls “a static conception of what it means to be culturally relevant.” She explains it thus:

I have grown increasingly dissatisfied with what seems to be a *static conception* [emphasis added] of what it means to be culturally relevant. Many practitioners...seem stuck in very limited and *superficial notions* [emphasis added] of culture. Thus, the fluidity and variety within cultural groups has regularly been lost. (2014, p. 77)

So then, I am left wondering: Does such a shift from culturally relevant pedagogy to culturally sustaining pedagogy do enough to address Ladson-Billings' concern about culture being *conceived* of as permanent and stagnant? Is it possible to change frameworks meaningfully if the very structures, or mode of thought itself remains pretty much the same, i.e., it remains embedded in classical western ways of thinking or conceiving? After all, Ladson-Billings does specifically identify her dissatisfaction with the static *conception* of what it means to be culturally relevant and with the limited and superficial *notions* of culture. If it is indeed our conception of culture that renders it stagnant, should we not then give this problem of a fixed cultural conception of culture a philosophical reading that explores how different modes of thinking can render culture somewhat static?

Thinking through my Cultural Mode of Thinking

Cultural Identity almost always becomes a complex issue for those of us who involve ourselves in work related to social justice and identity politics. Cultural identification becomes even more complicated for marginalized groups who supposedly have a homeland in a place other than where we currently reside. Maan's (2005) analysis somewhat encapsulates my cultural identity as I currently experience it. He says, "The immigrant has a home but does not live there, has a language not often spoken and has habits and modes of thought which are consistent with one's culture's norms" (p. 218). He contrasts this with the *children of immigrants* who are exiled from the very notion of a mother tongue and a motherland. They are also alienated from the very possibility of cultural habits that connect to those in the motherland. More relevant for this project is that they are alienated from a mode of thought that is consistent with one's culture's norms.

My parents, both children of indentured laborers brought from India to work on South African sugarcane fields, must surely experience cultural and linguistic alienation. How then do I, the child of the already alienated children of immigrants, experience culture, especially a cultural way of thinking? I am the granddaughter of South Indians who labored under the servitude of a culturally hostile colonial, apartheid regime. As such, the feeling of having a cultural home, of having cultural ways of knowing and doing has proven to be somewhat complex and elusive, made more complicated by my immigration to the US.

My four grandparents, like many of the other indentured laborers were between the ages of 11-15 when they landed in South Africa. As the lower caste in India, they were not allowed to read or write nor fully participate in religious rituals. Thus, they were excluded from much knowledge that could be found in sacred or philosophical texts. Moreover, once in South Africa, they were geographically removed from an older generation who could possibly have guided them in the more tangible cultural ways. So, they drew on fragmented understandings of Indian/Hindu customs and beliefs and found emancipatory spaces for forging new ways of being in a hostile land. While I can identify some new patterns in these more tangible cultural habits, like food choices, dress and rituals, I cannot attest to Maan's observation that immigrants have "modes of thought which are consistent with one's culture's norms;" for me, there has been very little explicit awareness of how these cultural modes of thought would be. My thinking has been largely about the *content of my thinking* - what I think- so much so that I had not even considered the possibilities of different *modes of thinking* - how I think. My exposure in an apartheid South Africa to discourse on thinking was perfunctory - Plato and his allegory of the cave formed the core of my undergraduate studies in philosophy.

In this allegory, Plato positions the cave-dwellers as prisoners who are so steeped in their own ignorance that they mistake the shadows for authentic objects. This distinction between the shadows and reality laid the foundation for my thinking about thinking. In short, I came to believe that the truth about things (and people) existed in stable ways with a somewhat permanent essence to their identity. The activity of thinking seemed to involve “looking” at phenomena in the “correct” way to unearth their true nature. Oriented by this mode of thought, my interpretation of Ladson-Billings’ principles, for example, would be that attaining truth is not easy because it is hidden in the shadowy cave of imperialistic ideological indoctrination. My classroom practice, then, would be built on the premise that students are somewhat blind to the truth that is already out there. By creating the right pedagogical encounters, I, like a skilled optician, could correct the myopic views of students so that they could have true insight. In other words, the truth is framed as an attainable goal- provided that the seeker is imbued with the correct lens, it can surely be apprehended.

Perhaps Tupac (1991) could explain more clearly what I mean through his poem, *Liberty Needs Glasses* “Excuse me,” he says, “but, Lady Liberty needs glasses and so does Mrs. Justice by her side.”

After naming the people that Lady Liberty and Mrs. Justice have bumped into, he says:

I mean really, if anyone really valued life
and cared about the masses.

They'd take 'em both to Pen Optical
and get two pairs of glasses (lines 15-18)

The truth, I came to believe, is out there - visible to those who are in the acceptable political sunlight, or to those who have the right ideological lens to craft the “correct” vision.

Little did I realize that this notion of a clear truth, of visibility and clarity is not a way of thinking that just happens naturally. Rather it is limited to a classical western way of thinking, or to a western epistemology. Ladson-Billings (2021) references the difference in perception of classical literature and folklore to remind that the concept of epistemology is not a trivial one for it legitimizes some systems of knowledge and it dismisses others. Western epistemology is steeped in a classical western way of knowing which validates only that which can be measured, known, and categorized through scientific modes of thinking.

The philosophy courses that I took in this ELC program introduced me to, amongst others German philosopher and post metaphysician, Martin Heidegger. His work challenged the legitimacy of scientific modes of knowing and helped me realize that there were indeed different modes of thinking. Despite his disrepute from his support for Nazism, many scholars who believe deeply in justice have used his thinking as a springboard for their own philosophical projects. Carl Mika (2017), a Māori scholar, Calvin Warren (2018), an Afro-pessimist and Marimba Ani (1994), an afro-centrist, all think with and beyond Heidegger's post-metaphysics. They have opened the space for me to consider the different modes of thinking; these different modes challenge the taken for granted western notion that the clearer things are, the more truthful they are. These thinkers have opened a space for realizing that our way of thinking about things that are concrete, like a table, or abstract like culture, may seem to be natural and timeless. However, their work highlights that structures of thinking are indeed time and space bound. Each period of time (epoch) and each (geographical) culture in that period establishes the boundaries within which something can show up to our consciousness, that is, within which something can become intelligible to us. The following research questions focus our attention on the structures

of thought that arise globally in our epoch, known as the Age of Technology, such that culture is allowed to show up only as something static and stable.

Research Questions

RQ 1. To what extent can Ladson-Billings' dissatisfaction with the static conception of culture be explored via a philosophical reading?

RQ 2. How could the notion of ontological anxiety, as described by both Martin Heidegger and Calvin Warren, support a philosophical reading of Ladson-Billings' concern about the lack of fluidity in CRP?

RQ 3. Storytelling and immersion are both key practices of Ladson-Billings' Culturally Relevant Practice. With insight from Carl Mika's description of our orientation to things by a calculative western way of knowing, what could be the limits of these more intuitive practices?

RQ 4. Following Heidegger, Warren, Ani and Mika's thinking against and beyond a classical western way of knowing, to what extent could different modes of thinking address Ladson-Billings' concern about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy becoming too static?

Setting up a Philosophical Explication for Ladson-Billings' Concerns

As I attempt to address the above-stated questions, this project brings Gloria Ladson-Billings' concern about the lack of fluidity in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy into conversation with the thinking of Calvin Warren, and Carl Mika who think with, against and beyond Heidegger by conversing with his work on metaphysics through a lens of Afro-pessimistic/ black nihilistic, Afro-centric, and Indigenous thinking respectively.

In the Age of technology, the thinking associated with metaphysics became all prevailing. Before this, European structures of thought described things as tentatively presenting themselves to us, and then withdrawing from our consciousness, unfolding, and receding again. They were never fully present; they always retained a mysteriousness about them, a fluidity. Heraclitus, one of the famous pre-Socratic philosophers described everything as always being in flux as evidenced by the line for which has become famous: "You can't step in the same river twice."

In contrast, thinking structured by modern European ways of knowing grants intelligibility, and more importantly, validity only to things that can be easily quantified into a more substantive, measurable, permanent structure.

Lovitt (1977) references Heidegger's work on anxiety (which is the basis of Chapter 2 in this project) to trace the rise of metaphysics in the European West. We are always anxious about the uncertainty of our being, which Heidegger describes as nothingness. The primordial or pre-ontological awareness that our being has no actual substance creates this anxiety. In the early Christian era, the philosophical and theological themes focused on how to be in a good relationship with God so as to eliminate this uncertainty, so as to find lasting security. Towards the latter part of the Christian era, the quest for security via the relationship with God disappeared, but the search for security remained. A new relationship between anxious humans and science unfolded. Ladson-Billings (2004) echoes this description of the rise of metaphysics, which she identifies as a tradition of enlightenment thinking. She describes the new notion of truth as being similar to the truth of the Christian church. The belief that absolute truth could be known through religion morphed into a trust that scientific modes of thinking could reveal the absolute truth and would curtail any uncertainty. Could this ontological anxiety and the concomitant desire for certainty possibly explain the lack of fluidity that Ladson-Billings observes in our conception of culture? To explore this question, I invite philosophers Martin Heidegger, Calvin Warren, Carl Mika and Marimba Ani.

Introducing the Participants in the Conversation

Martin Heidegger: Thinking away from Classical Western ways of Knowing

Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher, is thought to have initiated and sustained the European indictment of classical western ways of thinking. His early work dismissed the

prevailing philosophical subject-object distinction. This distinction described knowing the world as a mental activity in which the human, as a separate and superior subject, could detach itself from the world to observe things in an objective way. Instead, his work introduces a being that gets to know the world by being embedded in and inseparable from the things in the world. His later work problematizes the modern tendency to value a scientific, calculative mode of thinking. This project investigates to what extent such a mode of thinking could frame culture as being immutable - this is indeed Ladson-Billings' main concern.

Human beings, what Heidegger calls Dasein, are special kinds of beings in that our way of being in the world is tied up with an understanding of what it is to be. We are the only being that is constantly aware of our own being. We are the only being for whom our existence is an issue i.e., we are constantly both thinking about and suppressing thoughts of who we are, and the meaning of our lives. Our way of being is to be aware of the being of our own being. In addition, we are also able to disclose the being of other beings, or other things.

Dasein, which translates to "being-there" is always already in the world, interacting with things. It is in the world, not only in the sense that like other beings it occupies geographical space; the more important sense of being in the world as it applies to Dasein is that it is always engaging with and interpreting other things. Without Dasein, things in the world would just be isolated things - it is because of Dasein's engagement with things in the world that these things are drawn into relation with each other. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1927/1962) describes being as that which "determines entities as entities" (p. 25). "Determines" according to the google dictionary means to be the factor that makes things occur a certain way. It also means to ascertain or establish something exactly, typically because of research or calculation. But Stapleton (2010) offers a different understanding of Heidegger's "determine" in his reminder that

being does not “make” beings be in the sense of creating them or causing them to come into existence. “To determine” here means “something more like opening a place or space where these entities can show themselves for what they are. Or, as Heidegger sometimes says, being frees beings for their being (p. 45).

The difference in meaning between Heidegger’s use of the word “determine” and the current google dictionary meaning of the word, encapsulates the problem with our modern way of thinking, as Heidegger, Mika, Warren, and Ani all see it. They all claim it is rooted in classical western thinking. Classical western thinking, it seems, validates calculable, instrumental thinking as the *only* way of knowing. If, as scholars like Heidegger, Warren and Mika say, it is this scientific mode of thinking that forms the metaphysical infrastructure that conditions our orientation to the non-concrete, then it becomes important that we try to describe this conditioning and its implication in allowing for culture to be intelligible primarily as a static, stable entity. Hence this study makes the move to suggest that perhaps the concerns raised by Ladson-Billings about the fixity associated with cultural pedagogy could be more fully addressed within a philosophical framework.

As such, the study is premised on Heidegger’s thinking as it is taken up by afro-pessimism/black nihilism, afro-centric philosophy, and indigenous philosophy to offer a critique of western ways of knowing and to hint towards other possible modes of thinking that could possibly allow for us to conceive of culture as a more fluid entity.

Calvin Warren: Classical Western ways of Knowing and Racism

Calvin Warren (2018), like Mika (2017), reads with Heidegger as he describes how conflating justice and emancipation with rights and recognition maintains inequities, if there remains no interrogation of classical western metaphysics. Against the background of increasing

police brutality towards African American communities, he describes how our notions of freedom and justice reduce racism (what he terms anti-blackness) to social, political, and legal understandings. To broaden the parameters within which we think about justice, he insists that we give justice a philosophical dimension as well. He thinks beyond Heidegger by including a racial dimension that explores how anti-blackness is deployed to serve an onto-metaphysical purpose: to “incarnate metaphysical nothing, the terror of metaphysics” (p. 5) by concretizing the terrifyingly elusive metaphysical nothing in and through the flesh of Black bodies. In an anti-black world, the function of Blackness is to fill in the void of ontological nothingness, to give concrete form, or flesh to the nothing that would otherwise terrify being.

According to Warren, this overwhelming anxiety with ontological nothingness quickly transforms into hatred. He says:

What is hated about blacks is this nothing, the ontological terror, they must embody for the metaphysical world. Every lynching, castration, rape, shooting, and murder of blacks is an engagement with this nothing and the fantasy that nothing can be dominated once and for all. (p. 9)

Even where anxiety does not transform into hatred, it does inform the impetus to change Blackness into an object of knowledge-it seeks to dominate, analyze, calculate and schematize whether through law, biology, socioeconomics or politics.

Warren thinks with, against and beyond Heidegger. He acknowledges Heidegger’s complicity in Hitler’s White supremacist project but says that ignoring Heidegger’s contribution to trying to dismantle western metaphysics will not resolve the state sanctioned violence against Blacks, or the global oppressive conditions that confront Blacks. Sure, he says, it may make us feel “ethically enlightened” (p. 9) or it may seem as if it is strengthening our fight for justice, but

such an “ethically enlightened” attitude will lose sight of the metaphysical violence that Heidegger so relentlessly hoped to expose, as well as the metaphysical violence and its complicity in systemic violence.

Warren implicates what Heidegger calls “calculative thinking,” a kind of thinking that tries to manipulate, control, and eradicate the ontological anxiety associated with nothingness as a strategy for imposing nothingness onto blacks.

Carl Mika: Resisting Presence and Colonial Ways of Thinking

Carl Mika (2015) draws on Heidegger’s thinking as he attempts to frame metaphysics, i.e. this relationship of orientation and disclosure, as a political act for indigenous people. Indigenous people have been relentlessly forced to represent things and experiences in the world in line with western metaphysics- Mika sees this as being an act of epistemological violence. He identifies western metaphysics, which, drawing from Derrida, he calls a “metaphysics of presence,” or a “thereness” as having significant philosophical and political consequences for the Māori because of its “subtlety and omnipresence” (p.2). This pervasiveness makes it almost impossible to think outside of colonial ideas of existence and how that existence reveals itself. Audre Lorde (1984) would perhaps describe this as the impossibility of using the master’s (philosophical) tools to dismantle the master’s house. Andreotti (2017) in the preface to Mika’s work says that the western orientation to the world smothers the world in a tightly woven blanket of meaning. This is aimed at determining a stable truth, objectively holding something in its place (its presence) to eliminate all forms of uncertainty and to ensure mastery of the world. On the other hand, a more indigenous orientation cloaks the world in mystery where truth is co-created in a sustained relationship with all entities in the world, but remains always open, elusive and equivocal.

So, according to Mika, it is these different predispositions to things in the world that orient our ways of being in the world. Western tradition sees fluidity, change and mystery as something that needs to be brought under control; it sees knowledge (including knowledge of identity) as a means to eradicate uncertainty and it justifies the domination as part of the process of progress. In essence, according to Mika, this way of being is intricately implicated in the historical colonial project of domination, exploitation, and eradication of difference.

Heidegger may also be accused of a similar colonial project if one considers his support for Hitler's National Socialism. Why then would Mika think alongside him? Mika states that most western philosophers are complicit in the same metaphysics of presence, in the same way of being that tends to be dominating and calculating— he calls these the hidden philosophers and says that they are just as problematic for the indigenous person as are those who, like Heidegger, have been explicit about their oppressive political beliefs. He warns that if we are going to “dispense” with Heidegger, then we ought to “ignore those philosophers who would drive the brand of anthropology, science, research and law” that has devastated indigenous communities, even if those philosophers “never had indigenous peoples in their sights” (p. 86).

Heidegger, he says must be recognized for locating the problem with western metaphysics and for linking the need for calculable, definite meanings with other tendencies to supercharge the self so that being orientates itself in a particular way – as something separated from, in control of, and superior to the rest of the entities in the world. According to Bell (n.d.) until Martin Heidegger's revision of metaphysics, the term presence seemed to be “crystallized in its privileged position next to reality and truth” (para. 3). In other words, what Mika finds helpful is that Heidegger's metaphysical project tries to disclose how metaphysics and its need for absolute truths deny being's primordial propensity for openness to our grounded experiences.

Heidegger describes the depth to which we are steeped in the idea that things always present themselves fully and explicitly. He also describes our intense belief in the notion that we can experience, name, and categorize accurately and fully if only we have the correct procedures in place. These tendencies have us leaving nothing (including the Other) to itself. Mika says this orientation to truth and reality leaves the indigenous individual grappling not just with the colonial knowledge, but even with the very basic comportment of the self to other things in the world.

Mika, then, describes how a philosophical orientation that is based on metaphysics with its impetus to calculate, to dominate, to master and to control is an act of violence. He invites us, like Heidegger does, to imagine the possibilities of a more meditative, or what he calls a more speculative comportment.

Warren and Mika describe the intimate relationship between western metaphysics and scientific ways of thinking and show how both become complicit in very static ways of thinking. Perhaps it is this kind of scientific, calculative thinking that holds us in the grip of the static conceptions of culture that concern Ladson-Billings. Both authors, together with Heidegger offer more meditative, speculative, poetic modes of thinking. Could such modes of thinking possibly recondition our metaphysical infrastructure? Could this reconditioning allow culture to be intelligible in its more protean nature?

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction, or Being Open to a Conversation

In this chapter, I describe Gloria Ladson-Billings' dissatisfaction with the way in which we conceive of culture such that we render it static and stagnant. Since it is our *conception* of culture that is the root of Ladson-Billings' dissatisfaction, I offer a motivation for why a

philosophical reading, with a focus on metaphysics, may offer another dimension to the description of the problem. The chapter introduces ways of knowing and being and hints briefly at how each of the interlocutors - Martin Heidegger, Calvin Warren, Carl Mika, and Marimba Ani - frame classical western ways of knowing as being complicit in promoting an inclination to static thinking. This mode of static thinking may possibly render Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy less meaningful.

Chapter 2: Always Seeking Closure

Here I lay out the paradox that is inherent in CRP, that is, its need to maintain and preserve, while simultaneously being fluid enough to address the ever-present openness that necessarily goes with any living culture. This is where the tension in Ladson-Billings' work lies- any meaningful cultural pedagogical practice requires an open flow that makes constant change feasible. However, that space for change is inevitably foreclosed on.

In this chapter I converse with Martin Heidegger and Calvin Warren to describe the ontological forces that could possibly foreclose on the pre-ontological openness of being, and I relate that to the foreclosure on the fluidity that is required for meaningful CRP. I work with Martin Heidegger's description of ontological anxieties for these could probably account for why Dasein so rapidly flees from its pre-ontological possibility of openness, projection, and newness only to take refuge in the comfort of fixed cultural understandings.

Calvin Warren expands on the concept of ontological anxiety by showing how maintaining racial categories serves a metaphysical purpose to assuage the terrifying anxiety that follows being's (white being's) realization of the fact that deep down, being is nothing. Black bodies have, through scientific thinking, become the concrete nothing, the placeholder for the metaphysical nothing and in asserting control over this embodied nothing, ontological anxiety

becomes less foreboding. Anxiety produces a desire for stable, measurable categories of people whose knowability appears to make them more controllable. Ironically, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy may work to produce this knowability, and hence may work to undermine the newness and fluidity that Ladson-Billings seems to find lacking in CRP which she says has indeed become too fixed and static.

Chapter 3: Seeing Clearly Clouds our Thinking

Two key concepts from Ladson-Billings' thinking, namely cultural immersion and storytelling are explored in this chapter. Her work suggests that teachers should immerse themselves in their students' cultural context to become familiar with their students' ways of doing and thinking. In doing so, they may help foster a community or family of learners. In fact, Ladson-Billings (2009) calls for teacher candidates to have a "prolonged immersion" (p.146) in African American culture so that they could learn the more meaningful, more implicit cultural nuances of their students' lives.

According to Dreyfus' (1991) interpretation of Heidegger this expectation that the implicit can and should become explicit is the repeated mistake of philosophers. Philosophers, he says, want to give a conceptual account of what is being understood; everyday being, on the other hand, understands pre-conceptually. Heidegger makes the claim that we have no content of the mind, no self-contained mental content – our understanding comes from our involvement in the world. In fact, this involvement, for the most part, is in the form of "mindless" (p. 3) everyday coping skills, or a "self-less" awareness that comes with adept coping (p. 67). Heidegger introduces the term absorbed coping which is not that of a mind with content directed toward objects, but rather a non-thematic absorption in the activity with which we are busy. We become so absorbed in what we are doing that the equipment, or the ideas involved in that

activity become transparent. Dreyfus says that when we are using equipment in our everyday compartment, the equipment has a tendency to “disappear” (p. 64). He goes on to say that “precisely when it is most genuinely appropriated,” (p. 65) equipment becomes transparent, and we are not aware of the equipment having any characteristics at all. This may allude to the impossibility of making genuine understandings of cultural habits explicit, or fully present.

This idea of genuine appropriation being transparent opens up a conversation between Heidegger and Carl Mika whose philosophical project resonates with Heidegger’s in that he shows how this expectation that everything can be fully present, knowable and shareable destroys beings’ relationship with every other aspect of the universe. Sharing stories, cultural immersion, trying to learn about another’s culture may all seem to open a space for meaningful relationships. However, as Mika reminds the classical western “metaphysical” infrastructure conditions our turning to the other, demanding that we approach the other with the intention of seizing a stable truth about the other. Hence, relationships focus on gaining knowledge about the other, knowledge that would make the other knowable and predictable - unknowability of the other is approached as a problem to be solved.

On the other hand, Indigenous ways of being approach this unknowability as a gift that signals interdependence and the interdependence in turn signals incompleteness. Mika explains this interdependence and incompleteness with the term “worldedness,” which explains that when something presents itself to me, it is embedded in a network of other things that may appear or hide, so that no one thing can be fully understood as a separate, discrete entity. The attempt to force that which is fundamentally unknowable to reveal itself could be tantamount to violence, and the traditional western metaphysics is implicated in this violent relationship of getting to know the other.

This chapter then explores what's at stake for the relationships that Culturally Relevant Pedagogy hopes to foster if it forecloses on the unknowability that Heidegger and Mika seem to think is integral for ethical, caring relationships.

Chapter 4: Thinking Away from a Colonial Brand of Scientific Thinking

The problem with classical or colonial western thinking is that it has created the structures of thought whereby things become intelligible to us only in their whatness - their quantifiable, classifiable essence, rather than in their howness, their existence, i.e. how they are in the world. How did it happen then that the substance came to be more intelligible while the existence is forgotten? While our way of thinking about things may seem to be natural and timeless, the history of philosophy will show that structures of thinking are indeed time and space bound.

To expand our understanding of ways of scientific thinking, I also converse with Thomas Khun (1978) whose philosophical work reveals that the structures of scientific thinking are also time and space bound. Our conversation so far with Heidegger, Warren, Mika and Ani may leave us believing that a colonial brand of scientific thinking holds sway. In this chapter, following these scholars we explore the possibility of different modes of thinking. Kuhn extends our understanding by opening a space to think differently about the permanence of scientific modes of thinking. He distinguishes between two brands of scientific research, namely that whose "most immediate goal is to increase understanding" and that whose goal is to have "control of nature" (p. 233). Currently, if we are to believe Heidegger, Mika and Ani, the colonial brand of science that aims at manipulation and control is the one that prevails. Kuhn's discussion of paradigms and scientific revolutions could possibly offer a space for breaking away from the stranglehold of this brand of science. If we are currently orientated by scientific modes of

thinking that aim at uber-control, then his work reminds that as with the field of philosophy, the structures of thinking that orient us in this way can be disrupted. Therefore, there may be space for disruption of our orientation to only that which is measurable, quantifiable, and controllable. The question then is perhaps how would the structures of the mode of thinking have to be in our context for culture (Ladson-Billings' concern) to be intelligible as a fluid entity?

This chapter draws from the philosophical projects of Martin Heidegger, Calvin Warren, Marimba Ani, Carl Mika and Thomas Kuhn to explore the possibility of opening up the space for different modes of thinking that could possibly address Ladson-Billings' concern that our thinking about culture has rendered it a stagnant, stable entity which no longer has a meaningful place in students' lives.

Heidegger carefully describes the technological thinking that is characteristic of this epoch. He traces this back to western metaphysics and its desire for predictability and control. He lays out an alternative- meditative thinking, sometimes called poetic thinking and describes how this has the potential to create spaces for openness and fluidity of thought. This chapter will look at Heidegger's concept of "Gelassenheit" which is described as releasement or letting go, a being awake to the moments when things fully disclose themselves.

Calvin Warren challenges the current socio-political movements that frame all black social and political agony as a violation of human rights, as the non-recognition of Blacks presenting "(human) being." Attempts to eradicate anti-blackness have been grounded in the resources that being has to offer- entitlement to human (being) rights. Movements, like Black lives matter, all pre-suppose that if the being of the Black is remembered, then justice will prevail. But Warren says this is a conceptual error, an error of metaphysics. What is this conceptual error? If movements for change should not ground their cause in the appeal for equity

as beings, what recourse do they have? Warren calls for a refocus on black existence and spirit. He says, “the wedding of *thought* [emphasis added] and *being* [emphasis added] is responsible for spirit murder” (Warren, 2021). For Whites, like Heidegger describes the severance between bodies and being can be described as the result of the western metaphysical quest for control and certainty; this leads to the forgetting of being. Blackness, Warren says, has not been forgotten; it has in fact been written out of being. For this reason, he explores the possibility of recreating the relationship between *thought* and *spirit*. He says:

The important task for black thinking (philosophizing, theorizing, theologizing, poeticizing) is to imagine black existence without Being, humanism, or the human. Such thinking would lead us into an abyss. But we must face this abyss - its terror and majesty. I would suggest that this thinking leads us into the spirit, something exceeding and preceding the metaphysical world. We are still on the path to developing a phenomenology of black spirit, but it is an important enterprise. (2018, p. 171)

To guide us on this path of developing a phenomenology of Black spirit, I invite Marimba Ani. She defines spirit as a “creative force that unites all phenomena” (pg. xxvi). Heidegger’s Dasein or being is “not just one thing among others; it is at the center of the world, drawing together its threads” (Inwood, p. 3e). We see then that Ani’s spirit performs a metaphysical labor that is like Heidegger’s being. Which will better serve the needs of blackness? Which would better orient us to culture as a fluid entity? That is the question that chapter 4 hopes to explore.

In this chapter, we also accept Carl Mika’s invitation to think speculatively with him. Mika’s work proposes speculative thinking as a more appropriate way to turn to the world since it allows for the complex relationships between things in the world, so complex that they remain

fundamentally unknowable. He contrasts speculative thinking with the metaphysics of presence demanded by a classical western metaphysics that seeks to capture something through knowledge that stabilizes.

Thomas Kuhn offers a way for us to navigate the tension between scientific knowledge that could be considered stabilizing and that which may be revolutionary. He offers another way to think about flexibility and fluidity and problematizes the emphasis on “flexibility and openness” and suggests that “convergent thinking is just as essential to scientific advance as, is divergent” (p. 226). Following his thinking, I consider the implications for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, by exploring the notions of securing and preserving of culture.

Conclusion

In this study I bring together the thinking of Martin Heidegger, Calvin Warren, Carl Mika and Marimba Ani to explore the link between western metaphysics, scientific modes of thinking and the lack of openness in thinking. In the last chapter, I invite Thomas Kuhn to help us deepen our understanding of the structures of (scientific) thinking. His thinking allows a space for valuing knowledge that stabilizes, for this knowledge can lead to meaningful change. Through a close analysis of texts, I describe to what extent meaningful encounters, pedagogical or otherwise, could exist, if our disposition to the world remains under the control of calculative, goal-driven, control-obsessed thinking? I further investigate how are the openings that these scholars offer for different modes of thinking? How could these offerings open up spaces to address Ladson-Billings’ concern that our conceptions of culture as a stable, transmissible entity have rendered Culturally Relevant Pedagogy less meaningful?

CHAPTER II: ALWAYS SEEKING CLOSURE

Introduction: Ladson-Billings, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Fluidity

Since the early 90's a variety of names have been used to describe the classroom practices that aim to address cultural components in a meaningful way: Ladson-Billings' Culturally relevant pedagogy (1994), Geneva Gay's Culturally responsive pedagogy (2000), Sharroky Hollie's Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning (2011) and Paris' Culturally sustaining pedagogy (2012). Each of these offers slightly different iterations on how to respond to the cultural dimensions of education in a way that matters. Of particular significance to this study is that each one of these iterations articulates a common concern. This concern is that teachers' conception of culture as being immutable seems to render a classroom practice that enters on cultural preservation and cultural transmission. As a result, classroom practices seem to unfold in ways that are less likely to meet student needs in a meaningful way.

In this chapter, I work from the premise that since 1989 one of the undisputed leaders in the field of culturally meaningful pedagogy, Gloria Ladson-Billings, has persistently reminded educators about this core idea - any practice that is committed to meaningful engagement with cultural identity should conceive of culture as being fluid. Why then, I ask, are we so recalcitrant in changing how we think about culture? Why do we cling to thinking that culture can and should be described within rigid categories? Why do we continue to practice under the assumption that culture can be fully known, preserved and then seamlessly transmitted from teacher to student, or vice versa? Do we simply lack content information about the lived realities of student or youth culture? Do we need more training in cultural sensitivity and inclusion-based strategies? Or is there perhaps something else at play that prevents us from orienting ourselves to culture such that we can conceive of it as having fluidity and flux?

Since the complexity seems to lie with the way we think about culture, or orient ourselves toward culture, I give this study a philosophical framing and, in this chapter, I draw on the work of two philosophers, Martin Heidegger and Calvin Warren. I have chosen them because their philosophical projects unfold from the premise that we are pre-ontologically always open to things in the world. According to them, we are always relating to the things in the world and we are incessantly interpreting and re-interpreting. This relentless activity of interpretation should, by all accounts, continuously offer the possibility of bringing newness to the world. Why then would it be so difficult to conceive of culture as being open to newness?

I begin this chapter by highlighting Ladson-Billings' call for conceiving of culture as being open and mutable. Then, I introduce Heidegger's thinking about openness and newness, and his description of ontological anxiety. He says that this anxiety inevitably forecloses on our pre-ontological disposition toward openness. Next, I describe Calvin Warren's thinking about ontological anxiety. Heidegger describes this ontological anxiety as that which is endemic to all human beings. Calvin Warren goes beyond to implicate the racism inherent in scientific modes of thinking as something that intensifies Heidegger's ontological anxiety. Lastly, I bring both philosophers into conversation with Gloria Ladson-Billings' treatise on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

Ladson-Billings: Making the Call for Conceiving of Culture as Being a Fluid Entity

Gloria Ladson-Billings' Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is often identified as one of the most influential theories to interrogate the relationship between culture and education. Hollie (2017) calls her inaugural text, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American Children* (1994) "groundbreaking" and "the star in the culturally responsive universe" (p. 26). Her concern over teachers' orientation to culture as a static entity gives direction to this project.

As noted in Chapter1, the very concept of culture has colonial implications, and fluidity in culture can be directly linked to colonial imperatives. Even as I remain mindful of this, I understand that the concept of culture remains integral to education. I therefore explore the kind of thinking that would be best to address the cultural dimensions of education in ways that would challenge the limiting colonial concepts. Ladson-Billings seems to believe that conceiving of culture as a fluid, mutable entity could perform such labor.

In her inaugural text, she encourages this by comparing the epistemological underpinnings of two different orientations to knowledge. Critical Race Theory, with which she aligns her projects, frames knowledge as something that is “continuously recreated, recycled, and shared by teachers and students.” Assimilationist pedagogy, on the other hand, frames knowledge as something that remains static, infallible and fully transmittable (p. 89).

In another of her earlier works, *Crossing over to Canaan* (2001), she reminds us that we need to be flexible about students’ local and global culture. She also calls for thinking about cultural affiliations as being “nested and multifaceted,” and the cultural categories as being merely “crude approximations” of individuals’ cultures (p.100). Ladson-Billings’ (2003) reflections on the complexities of understanding cultural belonging in the wake of the attack on the twin towers, sees her lamenting the fact that “...we continue to grapple with a cultural logic locked in binaries (that) understands dichotomy and opposition and has little room for complexity. It cannot hold two competing thoughts” at once (p. 7). Here again she is adamant that cultural affiliations have many nuances that cannot be captured through our mode of thinking that fits everything into neat, categorizable entities.

In *Is meeting the diverse needs of all students possible?* (2011), she reinforced her belief in the description of classrooms as “complex organisms (where) the students bring with them

richly textured biographies and teachers bring their own set of complexities” (p. 13). In calling for a move away from Culturally Relevant Pedagogy to Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (2014) she observed that “students often learn about static images of cultural histories, customs, and traditional ways of being. However, culture is always changing” (p. 75). She describes three generations of Hmong to illustrate that even within cultures there are shifts in belief systems, human activity, production, and thought. For this reason, she says, teachers need to be aware of heterogeneity even within seemingly homogenous cultural contexts. Later in her scholarship, in an article titled “I’m here for the hard re-set: post pandemic pedagogy to preserve our culture” (2021), she references the teacher of French students of African descent who expressed her concern about high dropout rates to Ladson-Billings. By way of supporting her belief that she was meeting the cultural needs of her students, the teacher elaborated that she did indeed have representations of Francophone African descent people in her class. However, Ladson-Billings found that the teacher had pictures of Francophone Africans who were generally in traditional clothing, living in traditional settings and involved in traditional activities of long ago juxtaposed with modern, advanced French architecture. The teacher had no examples of more modern-living Francophone Blacks. Ladson-Billings implies that these students may have felt culturally estranged since they may have been unable to see themselves in these visuals of people like them frozen in time.

Even in her latest works, Ladson-Billings continues to encourage a more complex nuanced, fluid approach to culture. For example, she describes the youth of today as being “border crossers (who) have no trouble blurring the boundaries between things like sacred and profane, mainstream and youth culture, gender identities, racial and ethnic identities.” She cautions that “the rigid categorizations that many of us ‘adults’ have used to determine who

people are, do not hold true for this generation (2021a, p. 166). Yet again, she calls attention to the fluidity of youth cultural identity when she describes it as a “mash-up with permeable boundaries” that do not fit into rigid categories of social identities that most adults have used “to make distinctions and create hierarchies” (Ladson-Billings, 2020, p. 28).

In contrast she accuses academic institutions of adding superficial activities such as choosing African sounding names for reading groups, buying pre-scripted programs, and propagating checklists and rubrics as quicksteps to supporting teachers in a meaningless version of culturally relevant pedagogy. She reminds that for meaningful culturally relevant pedagogy there are “no templates” for classroom implementation. Ladson-Billings (2014) echoes her insistence that *conceptions* of what it means to be culturally relevant, and *notions* of culture form the basis of meaningful work by reminding that this work is “embedded in the *belief systems, rationales, and dispositions* toward culture, race, and justice that teachers hold” (Ladson-Billings and Dixson, 2021, p. 127).

Despite the ever-repeated call for culture to be conceived of as complex and ever-changing, classroom practice continues to corral it into a categorizable, simplified, and manageable entity. Since Ladson-Billings (2014) locates her dissatisfaction with CRP in our *conception* and *notion* of culture as something static, in our *dispositions* and *rationales*, this project makes the move to describe the *thinking* itself that renders culture as something that is unchangeable. For this reason, I turn to philosophy to help me describe this recalcitrance in making a shift in our mode of thinking,

Openness and Vulnerability

How would we describe the complexity of orienting ourselves philosophically to think culture as a dynamic force of renewal? That is, beyond the Ladson-Billings’ account, are there

other ways of thinking that address race and culture that go to the core of Black culture as lived experience? Two scholars who help us craft this description are Martin Heidegger, a post metaphysician and Calvin Warren who thinks against and beyond Heidegger as he focuses on anti-blackness and its complicity in foreclosing on the possibility of thinking newness.

We are always open to the world pre-reflectively as a mode of our being-in-the-world. We live in the world before we think about the world we live in; hence we are always in flux constantly interpreting it as circumstances change. As such, static conceptions of social life may lie not in our living in the world, but in the ways we “think” and theorize about the world.”

Both Heidegger and Warren unfold their projects from this understanding that we are pre-ontologically always open to things in the world; we are always relating to the things in the world, and we are always interpreting and re-interpreting. This continuously offers the possibility of bringing newness to the world, and with this newness, the anxiety around “risk” in living. If we are always already open to the encounter with things, if we are primordially open to the things in the world, and if we cannot help but bring new interpretations to things, how then is it possible to even lack openness, to lack newness in thinking about culture? Heidegger implicates ontological anxiety and ontological vulnerability in the foreclosure of this openness. Warren offers a different path to this thinking - he takes Heidegger’s vulnerability and anxiety and implicates them in the prevailing global anti-blackness. In doing so, he describes how anti-blackness itself continues to foreclose on our potential for an openness to the world.

Many of the words associated with vulnerability in the Oxford English Dictionary have negative connotations in everyday use: assailable, harmfulness, helplessness, powerlessness, feebleness, frailness and infirmity all allude to unfavorable conditions. Amongst this list of words that are associated with vulnerability, appears the word “openness,” which in everyday

use does not immediately align itself with negativity. After all, when we are amenable to new ideas, we are lauded for being open to change. In much the same way, we are praised for having open arms, or for having an open-door policy. Being open could mean being honest or being forward-thinking. But it could also mean being susceptible, as in being open to attack and to danger. It is this ambiguous, almost paradoxical sense of openness that this chapter explores as the condition for unpredictability and newness in human existence; it is also the condition of the foreclosure on this newness. Warren drawing on the work of Jean-Luc Nancy (1993) describes this paradox by drawing a distinction between disclosedness (that which opens up the world) and the decision that closes off to “self-assure existence, to remove uncertainty, and to close the openness of Being’s thrown-ness” (p. 94). Dasein discloses the structures of things in the world, and also has the know how to be open to its own structure of being, that is, it has the propensity for understanding its openness, as well as the pre-reflective understanding of “the closing of it off” (Heidegger, p.359) to mitigate against the risk and uncertainty that come with openness.

Heidegger’s Openness, Vulnerability and Anxiety

Martin Heidegger’s philosophical project sees him creating the word “Dasein” to refer to both the human being and to the type of being that humans have, i.e., a being that is implicitly aware of the need to find meaning in its own existence. It does by trying to come to terms with its position of vulnerability and openness in both senses of the word, as discussed above. His philosophical reflections speak to the human condition and its primordial proclivity for openness and fluidity, as well as its paradoxical primordial desire for stability and certainty. Dasein, he says, is always already in the world, not simply in that it occupies a geographical place in the world together with other things, but in the sense that it is open to the things in the world. By this we mean that it cannot help but be there in the world, always already in a continuous relationship

of engaging with, and interpreting other things in the world. Thomas Sheehan (2001), whose work traces the change in Heidegger's later thinking, states that one idea remains constant even as Heidegger's focus changes from there-being to being itself. The core idea in both Heidegger's earlier and later thinking is being open. Sheehan describes this openness as "the ineluctable condition of our essence, not an occasional accomplishment of our wills. It is our 'fate,' the way we always already are" (p. 194). How then could it be possible to foreclose on this primordial openness to the extent that our thinking, more specifically, our thinking about culture devolves it into something closed and static?

According to Heidegger, we are thrown into a world of uncertainty that leaves us always-already vulnerable and in a state of anxiety. To elaborate, Heidegger draws a distinction between fear and anxiety. Our fear, he explains, is towards specific things in the world. We may fear snakes, or violence, or losing our jobs. Heidegger (1962/1927) says that we feel fear towards an "entity within-the-world which comes from some definite region ... and is bringing itself close, and yet might stay away" (p. 230). Anxiety, on the other hand, is not directed at any specific thing. Rather, we are anxious about our very existence, our being-in-the-world itself. While fear is felt towards an "entity within-the-world," Heidegger makes the claim that in anxiety "what oppresses us is not this or that, nor is it the summation of everything.... rather... it is the world itself" (p. 231). So, what then, does Heidegger's ontological anxiety have to do with this mode of thinking that frames culture as being static?

Heidegger uses the example of the hammer to describe our everyday comportment in the world. In this mode of concerned absorption, we are not aware of anxiety. When Dasein is absorbed in the activity of hammering, he says, the hammer is not perceived as a stand-alone

thing, but rather as just one tool within the entire context of hammering for a certain purpose. It becomes transparent as but a nexus in the world of the workshop. Dasein begins to see the hammer as a discrete, stand-alone thing only when the hammer breaks, for example. Until this breakdown, the hammer is understood in its “serviceability and usability...” (p. 184) and overall significance in the world at large, not as a thing with individual properties. This illustrates how we become one with things in the world in our everyday encounters of absorption. Rather than standing above things in a detached, contemplative manner as classical western metaphysics would have us believe, we become familiar with things in the world through our involvement. We become so familiar with the things in the world that they become transparent, i.e., our awareness of their characteristics recedes, and our focus is simply on the activity itself. This familiarity can be described as being at home with the world, but during a breakdown like described above, we focus on the individual characteristics of the thing in a more circumspect way. For most breakdowns, we already have ways of coping, so after a moment of minimal disruption, we can move to a new way of coping and to resume normal activity. Heidegger claims that when things are functioning smoothly, “The assignments themselves are not observed; they are rather ‘there’.” But when an assignment has been disturbed then, “the assignment becomes explicit... (and) we catch sight of the ‘towards-this’ itself” (p. 105).

The breakdown of the hammer causes Dasein to become aware of the tool itself as well as the purpose of the activity of hammering. In the same way, anxiety acts as an existential or ontological breakdown that forces us out of being at home in the world. It creates the conditions for contemplation of our own purpose and reveals the nature of Dasein as nothingness. In our everyday comportment, Dasein is not only absorbed with tools, but also with others, and takes up a public way of being. We learn to take up the ways of our family, our community, our culture

and we feel at home in the world. But without warning, without reason, out of nowhere, anxiety causes a breakdown in our public way of being. Heidegger explains that during these moments of anxiety, everything that is familiar about the world, everything that makes Dasein at home with the world withdraws, and all that was once known stands out in its unfamiliarity. Part of this unfamiliarity or estrangement that stands out in all its starkness is our belonging, our identity, and our purpose.

For Heidegger, ontological anxiety and the unfamiliarity that it engenders can best be described as an attunement or mood that could open the space for the understanding of being as openness and nothingness. Heidegger's thinking about anxiety unfolds from the premise that Dasein, being primordially self-interpreting, can interpret itself to be anything it wants to be within the parameters of its social context. In essence, this means that Dasein is nothingness – it has no stable, essential, or primordial nature. However, confronting this nothingness fills Dasein with anxiety. The moment we think of ourselves as being nothing in an ontological sense, as having no ground, our stomachs may heave in discomfort and our thoughts may immediately latch onto something that defines who we are in society: mother, teacher, or friend. Dreyfus (1991) in his discussion of Heidegger, points to the claiming of a cultural identity as a similarly grounding factor when he says that despite its groundless nature, “Dasein always understands itself as having some specific essential nature. It grounds its actions in its understanding of human nature and feels at home in belonging to a certain nation or a certain race” (p. 25).

With everything falling away, then, all that remains for us to contend with is our being itself. (Of course, being at home, and facing only occasional falling away is the prerogative of those that enjoy a dominant socio-political identity. In the later section titled “Culturally

Relevant Pedagogy - a Motivated Conspiracy?" I look at the implications for those who battle a persistent sense of homelessness.)

Part of this contention for those who feel occasional "not fitting in" may come in the form of questions, such as, who am I really? What is the purpose of my life? What is the meaning of my life? At this point, Dasein can choose to quickly retreat into the stability of its cultural or community norms, or it can choose to stay with the uneasiness of unfamiliarity to work out answers to these questions. This is how it can work out how to become an "existentiell modification of the 'they'" (Heidegger, p. 158). According to Heidegger, this working out and modification is an authentic way of being. Modification entails slightly new articulations of the communal, cultural, and historical conditions in which we find ourselves, thus having the potential to bring newness and fluidity into the world - according to Ladson-Billings this is ultimately desirable for a meaningful culturally relevant pedagogy.

Warren's Description of Openness, Anti-Blackness and Anxiety

Heidegger's nothingness, then, can be viewed as an event of celebration. It engenders an ontological anxiety or dissonance that allows an opening for new thinking about being, or for new becoming. Calvin Warren (2018), on the other hand, describes how this metaphysical nothing becomes a source of terror and erasure for Blacks. He provokes thinking beyond Heidegger when he asks, "But what happens when such becoming does not occur? When the event of Being does not stimulate a productive anxiety of actualization, but gets caught in a repetition of event-less demise and nothingness?" (p. 13).

This question about what happens when Black being is prevented from becoming is indicative of the ontological implications of race, neglected by Heidegger, and taken up by Calvin Warren as his philosophical project. In this project he indicts classical western

metaphysics - in particular, its emphasis on calculability - in anti-Blackness. Like Heidegger, he describes this brand of metaphysics as gaining its power from a sense of certainty, controllability and predictability. Warren (2016) claims that western metaphysics reduces the grandeur and openness of being into a “scientific plaything.” It becomes an object of “rationality, calculation, instrumentalization and schematization” which destroys “spontaneity and projectionality” (p. 56) and curtails the possibility of taking up life in a unique way.

Ontological nothing is forever threatening to destroy the power that emanates from this thinking that is embroiled in instrumentalization and schematization; it forever causes existential anxiety, and forever lays bare Dasein’s vulnerability. For Warren, this vulnerability and openness do not open a space for the ontologically emancipatory, celebratory moment that is characteristic of Heidegger’s thinking. On the contrary, Warren’s work exposes that classical western metaphysics imposes a specific role on Black being - its ontological purpose is to soothe the ontological anxieties of White Being. Western White being becomes anxious when it glimpses its openness, its potential for self-interpretation and it projects this anxiety onto Blacks in the form of anti-blackness. Its anxiety is quelled as it re-establishes a secure (false) ground for who it is racially and culturally. In this way anti-blackness closes off the potential for the openness of Being and closes off the potential for glimpses and possibilities of newness itself.

Warren (2022) analyses the Karen-call to describe the false grounding of being. Finding it legally and ethically unacceptable that white people call 911 to report Black people going about their everyday lives, leaders in San Francisco approved the Caren Act (Caution Against Racial and Exploitative Non-Emergencies Act), as a way to criminalize and deter Karen calls - calls made to the police by panicked Whites (especially women) to report perceived acts of criminality perpetrated by Blacks. His philosophical reading, while acknowledging the vicious

nature of these crimes and the sometimes-fatal consequences for Blacks, reframes the calls. Rather than interpreting these calls as a criminal emergency, he reveals these calls to be an ontological emergency for it is “the emergency in which being emerges” (p. 143). It is in this moment of emergency that the ontological question of who we are unexpectedly arises for Karen. It disrupts her absorption in the world as it calls into question everything, especially about her race, that she had previously taken for granted. Warren explains:

Within an emergency, being-as-event is projected, or temporally traversed, into the possibility of being-there (a future subjunctive unfolding). The “there-ness” of Being, then, is the possible Destiny of Dasein, a possibility requiring a “leap” into an unknown that Dasein already has a primordial understanding of. (p. 143)

But the leap into the unknown, the nothingness becomes a terrifying anxiety filled moment, a moment in which the anxiety is projected onto a Black body, and it is within this context that Karen-call is made to assuage the rising emergency of being. This is the ontological labor of which Warren speaks when he says that nothingness has been projected onto Black bodies to perform an ontological purpose.

I wonder if nine -year- old Bobbi Wilson’s recent experience in New Jersey could perhaps be somewhat indicative of the everyday, almost mundane, ontological labor that Warren describes as being forced upon Black bodies. Bobbi had just learnt about spotted lantern flies destroying trees, so she made an environmentally friendly spray and proceeded to treat the insect-infested trees in her neighborhood. However, the little girl’s spraying caused fear. Lawshe, her 71- year -old neighbor became so afraid that he called the police. Now, it must be noted that she had lived next door to Lawshe for eight years. Also of note, is that he held community leadership positions - he is a former treasurer and co-head of the Caldwell Republican

Committee, and a director of the Caldwell Community Center. The released 911 call goes as follows, “There’s a little Black woman, walking, spraying stuff on the sidewalks and trees... I don’t know what the hell she’s doing; it scares me though.” Lawshe also mentioned in his call that Wilson was wearing a “hood” and that she was a “real small woman” (Smith, 2022, para. 4).

Besides the obvious adultification bias (Epstein, Blake and Gonzales, 2017), the little girl’s mother noted the “trigger words that have resulted in the deaths of too many black and brown children and adults at the hands of the police- Black, hoodie; I’m scared.” (para. 6). Bobbi’s mother went on to describe her own maternal fears - her “shaking inside,” and her own efforts to “steady” herself so that the officer would not sense her anger for if he did, she knew it could get her into more trouble. She also described her daughter’s anxiety about going outside the next day. In response the lawyer for this scared adult community leader dismissively said, “All the cop did was drive by” and went on to further trivialize the mother’s assertion that the girl is now afraid by labeling such fear “absurd” and by claiming that the focus on this incident “makes real problems not be taken seriously” (para. 9). The sequence of anxiety over nothing, metamorphosing into concrete fear of something (black bodies performing mundane activities) and the attempt to dominate that anxiety by dominating the body leaves no one, not even innocuous young children intact. Not only are Black bodies negated and dominated, but their lived realities are trivialized, turned into nothing, and their narratives are controlled.

Heidegger's Dasein or Being, tormented by its nothingness, has a certain sense of agency in that it lays claim to its (White) identity to assuage its own anxieties. In contrast, Warren’s description of Black being clearly delineates how racial identity is imposed on Blacks to pacify the ontological anxieties of White Dasein. In short, his description shows that Blacks do not really claim an identity to quell Heidegger’s ontological anxiety, rather identity claims them and

forces them to serve what he terms ontological labor, i.e., it gives a sense of certainty and power to an otherwise powerless and anxiety-ridden White Dasein.

This labor is explained as Warren builds on Heidegger's notion of absorption as our default mode of comportment in the world. In moments of anxiety, when things break down and we are pulled away from the absorption in the world, when White Dasein comes face to face with ontological nothingness, when anxiety threatens to overwhelm, this anxiety is summarily projected onto Black being. The act of dominating, controlling, and destroying Black being becomes the existential equivalent of attempting to dominate, control and destroy the terrifying void of Dasein's nothingness. Thus, Blacks become what he calls the "quintessential tool" (p. 8). They are turned into nothing by scientific modes of thinking. This ascribed "nothingness" facilitates the socio-political-historical processes that culminate in domination of Blacks. Warren (2018) describes how the foundation of slavery, turning African flesh into a commodity is maintained by scientific modes of thinking. He reminds:

The purpose, then, of metaphysical arithmetic (schematized, calculative thinking) is to produce the unliving ... Once situated on the ledger, financial documents, and wills, black being is cast outside Dasein. These numbers provide space to black being without an ontological place... Numbers conceal this devastation behind purported objectivity, but the number and its calculus are far from innocuous. The ledger is precisely the reification of this non-place (this nothing), and it is the way metaphysics can in fact contend with it. (p. 113)

Allowing blackness to have space without "ontological place" turns Black bodies into nothing; asserting mastery over this nothing through thinking that quantifies and defines it helps to forget the nothingness of being. In this way Blackness is used to create the veneer that it is

possible to be in control of the uncertainty of our thrownness, and through this projection ontological anxiety morphs into anti-black violence.

Now we may think that only young powerless children like Bobbi Wilson, or powerless slaves are prone to such nullification and victimization, but we would be wrong. In May 2022, a Michigan teacher assigned an activity on evolution. One multiple choice question asked students to identify the primate in a series of pictures. The visual choices had pictures of zebras, whales, apes - and an image of former President Obama. The director of diversity for the school, Carolyn Lett, noted that the assignment was so wrong, she couldn't even understand it, and then added that the teacher had her, "biology hat on, but didn't realize the awareness that she should have had culturally" (Ley, 2022). Her contention that biology and cultural awareness are mutually exclusive may be illustrative of the compartmentalized, superficial thinking that masquerades as a scientific approach to thinking. Warren is more explicit and more insistent in his indictment of a calculative scientific approach in anti-Blackness.

Warren implicates calculative thinking and the unrelenting will to know in imposing and maintaining nothingness onto Blacks. Through the instruments of science and schematization, being has become a concrete thing, a thing to have, to analyze and to possess. Ladson-Billings, "confesses" that she came to think about race through the social science lens of anthropology, which she identifies as playing a significant role in establishing race as "a sense-making category" and in defining how we think about humanity. "Anthropology," she says, "was at the forefront of performing the sorting and ranking functions of race" (p. 226). Her description of anthropologists' 'studies' based on "measuring and evaluating skull size, skin color, hair texture, and the width and thickness of noses and lips, all in the purported service of proving some kind of objectivity behind the concept of race" (p. 228) clearly links social science to Warren's

schematizing thinking. Ismail (2015) reads the contradiction in Tylor's work to comment on the link between race and scientific thinking. He highlights that Tylor's definition of race and the evidence that he offers "demonstrates that races lack homogeneity, are constituted by singularity not similarity" yet measurements of features like skull size, lips and hair texture are passed off by Tylor as being "valid, veridic, grounded at this moment by scientific method" (p. 23).

Through a calculative way of thinking, being is reduced to an object and we forget that being is an ever-changing event through which we make sense of our reality. Our calculative orientation to being is understood as our (never-can-be-fulfilled) desire to make being fully knowable, measurable and graspable. This is projected onto Black being via the socio-political-economic strategies that are used to dominate and control Black people globally. Being is reduced to an object and we forget that being is an ever-changing event through which we make sense of our reality. Our scientific orientation to being is understood as our (never-can-be-fulfilled) desire to make being fully knowable, measurable and graspable. This is projected onto Black being via the socio-political-economic strategies that are used to dominate and control Black people globally.

Elizabeth Alexander's (2004) poem, *The Venus Hottentot* captures the unchecked scientific impetus to fully know everything. It also captures the racism and sheer cruelty perpetrated under the guise of scientific neutrality. The *Venus Hottentot* tells the story of Sarah Baartman, a South African woman of Khoisan origin who, in 1810, was brought to London where she was exhibited as a freak show attraction because of her unusual physical appearance. Georges Cuvier, of the National Museum of Natural History of Paris, showed immense curiosity in her physical characteristics and began using her for what he called scientific analysis. He

hoped to study the link between the African body, mental capacity, and sexual depravity. When Sarah died, Cuvier preserved her brain and vulva for further “scientific enquiry.”

Alexander divides the poem in two parts, each vocalizing the thoughts of Cuvier and Baartman respectively. Here are short excerpts from the poem chosen because they pertain directly to the intricate relationship between science and racism.

1. CUVIER

Science, science, science!

Everything is beautiful

blown up beneath my glass.

Colors dazzle insect wings.

A drop of water swirls

like marble. Ordinary

crumbs become stalactites

set in perfect angles

of geometry I'd thought

impossible. Few will

ever see what I see

through this microscope.

Cranial measurements
crowd my notebook pages,
and I am moving closer,
close to how these numbers

signify aspects of
national character.

Her genitalia
will float inside a labeled

pickling jar in the Musée
de l'Homme on a shelf
above Broca's brain:

"The Venus Hottentot." (lines 1-24)

Alexander's Cuvier names things that have intrigued him once he has seen them under the microscope. Indeed, it is jarring that he makes no distinction between insect wings, a drop of water, crumbs, and Baartman's genitalia; scientific inquiry equates them all as mere objects to be investigated in a seemingly unbiased, quantitative way. He also uses these quantitative measurements of the brain to make (seemingly dispassionate) assumptions about "national character." This is illustrative of what Dixon, Ladson-Billings, Suarez, et.al (2020) detail about anthropologists who have "fostered eugenicist notions grounded in measuring and evaluating skull size, skin color, hair texture, and the width and thickness of noses and lips, all in the

purported service of proving some kind of objectivity behind the concept of race” (p. 226). In juxtaposing Broca’s brain with Baartman’s genitalia, the poem highlights the national character that “science” imposes white males who are associated with intellect and Black females who are associated with perverse sexuality.

2.

Monsieur Cuvier investigates
between my legs, poking, prodding,
sure of his hypothesis.
I half expect him to pull silk
scarves from inside me, paper poppies,
then a rabbit! (lines 75- 80)

If he were to let me rise up
From this table
I’d spirit
his knives and cut out his black heart,
seal it with science fluid inside
a bell jar, place it on a low
shelf in a white man’s museum
so the whole world could see
it was shriveled and hard,
geometric, deformed, unnatural. (lines 114- 122)

Alexander has her Baartman draw parallels between the physical shape of the heart and the callous personality of the scientist. Just as Baartman comes to a non-scientific conclusion, so too does Cuvier - the difference is that his work, and the work of other scientists like him pass as verifiable truth. This brand of truth is endorsed and revered by an entire system of knowing and is co-opted in ways that have severe ramifications for blacks. Ladson-Billings (2006a) calls this rise in scientific modes of thinking a tradition of enlightenment thinking. Pre-enlightenment anxiety had been placated by the belief that absolute truth could be known through religious piety. This anxiety has now morphed into one that can be soothed by an implicit (misplaced) trust in the power of science to measure, explain and control the unpredictable, and to reveal an ultimate truth. The scientific, calculable mode of thought orients us to everything - from human biology (as illustrated by the experiments conducted on Sarah Baartman) to the governance of a country. Ladson-Billings references how leaders like Washington, Jefferson, and Madison resolved their obviously paradoxical commitment to both the ideals of liberty and justice and to their ideals of perpetuating slavery by turning to science for justification. As proof, she cites Jefferson's declaration that Whites and Blacks could never live together as equals because there were real distinctions that nature had made between the races.

Warren and Ladson-Billings both implicate an over-reliance on scientific ways of knowing in the continued anti-blackness of the world. Warren's philosophical reading of this anti-blackness and his focus on ontological anxiety help us reframe Ladson-Billings' concern about the stagnation that is symptomatic of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy - a Motivated Conspiracy?

Ontological anxiety refers to Dasein's uneasiness with its openness. This openness is understood as the possibility of being that which it interprets itself to be and has the potential to

offer spaces for slightly new iterations of the cultural self. By extension, this would mean possible new configurations of society - something that Ladson-Billings would maybe associate with a socio-political consciousness. Newness could unfold if Dasein were able to face the anxiety that comes with openness, if it were to accept that at its core it is in fact nothing and therefore able to interpret itself as anything within the parameters of its context. Rather, according to Warren, Dasein that aligns itself with a colonial brand of control and power redirects the anxious could-be- productive energy as security-seeking violence towards Black bodies.

But what about Dasein that does not align itself with western notions of power? To where is its anxious could-be-creative energy directed? Whence does it seek its security each time it becomes anxious at glimpses of its openness, its nothingness? Following Heidegger, Dasein could perhaps flee, that is, close up the opening for newness and fall back into the community ways of thinking, doing, and being. These ways could come from a strong sense of cultural belonging. I think it is well within reason, then, to infer that this strong sense of belonging could possibly be fostered by pedagogical approaches like Ladson-Billings' Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. In other words, we have to consider whether Culturally Relevant Pedagogy could, philosophically speaking, actually close down the possibility for freedom by offering anxiety ridden Dasein a space of refuge, a space to find a solid sense of self in prevailing cultural ways of being. This strong sense of identity is what Dreyfus (1991) would call "... a cultural conspiracy to provide the illusion of some ultimate meaning motivating action (p. 180). This illusion of meaning making temporarily deflects from the anxiety of the void of nothingness, as it imbues life with solidity. If we take Dreyfus at his word, then perhaps we have to consider that culture at its core offers an illusion of meaning. Could pedagogies like Culturally Relevant

Pedagogy in fact unwittingly become a part of this “conspiracy” that forecloses on openness and newness, even as it insists that openness and newness are central to its meaning? What would this mean for practicing in ways that respectfully shattering this illusion?

My reading of Gloria Ladson-Billings in this next section is framed by these questions and possibilities. We have already described Gloria Ladson-Billings repeatedly calls for the perceiving of culture as an open entity. But even while she makes a sustained plea for fluidity in our perceiving of culture, her work belies tinges of the struggle between the desire for openness and fluidity and the paradoxical, yet concomitant desire for stability and permanence. While this paradox is a primordial characteristic of all thinking, it has possibly become even more pervasive in the epoch of the rise of calculative, scientific modes of thinking that satisfy the ontological desire for calculable certainty and stability. Furthermore, the ontological terror for colonial Dasein and the fleeing from this terror as described by Warren, we may infer, must surely be intensified by the anti-black socio-political circumstances in which non-colonial Dasein finds itself.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 2001, 2003, 2011, 2014, 2021) has repeatedly reminded teachers that any pedagogy that takes the cultural needs of students seriously must necessarily also take the fluidity of culture seriously. Paradoxically, her work simultaneously calls for stability and permanence - following Heidegger and Warren, this is indeed the primordial nature of Dasein. In the context of an anti-black world, though, ontological anxiety could be intensified by ontic anxiety, in this case, the ever-present fear of rapid, epistemologically violent, forced loss of culture. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) describes the “psychic cost” that comes from the belief in the minds of teachers and students alike that academic success must necessarily “equate to a loss of their African American cultural identity” (p. 12). She illustrates the vulnerability of

minority cultures in her description of how black students changed when they arrived in the suburbs. “The students who succeeded academically,” she states, “began a slow but steady process of detaching themselves from many of their cultural markers...changing music they listened to, their hairstyles, their clothing, and their speech patterns” (2001, p. 80). Ladson-Billings chooses not to frame this change as the “mashup” that is endemic to cultural fluidity that she described earlier, but rather in terms of “loss.” Most likely this illustrates anxiety over the unequal power dynamics at play that could result in an unnaturally rapid rate of loss of culture.

This acute sense of unbalanced power dynamics is also evident in her description of whiteness becoming “reified” to such an extent that “the closer one is able to align oneself to whiteness, the more socially and culturally acceptable” one becomes. So says she in an article titled *Fighting for our lives* (2000). The title immediately signifies the constant battle-mode (what Heidegger would call homelessness) that blacks experience. This feeling of not being at home in the world is again emphasized in her choosing of the Randy Newman lyrics which highlight the constant threat to black survival. “They’re trying to wash us away. They’re trying to wash us away” she laments in the opening of her chapter, “The Meaning of Brown . . . for Now” (2006b). The lyrics, she claims, “invoke more than the hurricane and flood conditions . . .they also evoke the powerlessness and futility of struggling against white supremacy, particularly when that supremacy is undergirded by all of the social, cultural, economic, and political institutions” (p. 299).

She offers poignant insight into her personal anxiety over the possible loss of culture in her description of her first day at college. She describes her absolute relief at seeing “nothing but black faces” - since the 6th grade she had been panic-stricken at the thought of “losing (her) sense of who (she) was” (2001, p. 81) in desegregated schools. Ladson-Billings is extremely

aware of the fragility of not just African American culture, but culture in general. She warns that we risk losing meaningful cultural ways of being if we lack understanding. Her anecdote of a white student who had very little knowledge about his heritage is indicative of how, in her mind, these meaningful aspects of culture can quickly disappear. Choosing the umbrella of whiteness over Polish or Irish or Italian comes “at a cost,” she cautions, for when one chooses “whiteness as a primary identity, one's ethnic and cultural history disappears...all that is left to signal its existence is something about a potato famine and St. Patrick’s Day” (2001, p. 96- 97). She reiterates this ever-present risk in her observation about Native Americans who are perhaps “the greatest negative historical example of what happens when a culture is under attack and cannot be preserved.” According to her, atrocities like systemic extermination, removal from homelands, kidnapping and forced attendance at boarding schools ensure that there is “no way to preserve culture.” Both African American and American Indians are working hard, she says “to restore aspects of traditional culture” (2019, p. 299).

Unlike Heidegger’s Dasein whose default mode is absorption, the Dasein of Warren’s and Ladson-Billings’ world constantly operates in a mode of breakdown. Therefore, it never has the comfort of being at-home-in-the-world. Being constantly aware of its nothingness brings on more than just an ontological uneasiness - the world falls away constantly, exposing ontological, epistemological, political, *and* cultural nothingness. Seeking stability through cultural transmission and restoration and holding on to these cultural ways of being may become an avenue to alleviate the anxiety, a means to feel at home. Therefore, for colonized Dasein, culture and approaches like culturally relevant pedagogy may perform ontological labor - they may become the stability giving force that is the bulwark against the overwhelming terror of the nothingness, ontological and otherwise, that form the crux of an anti-black world. Given the

intensity of this terror, a paradoxical call of change and fluidity and preservation and restoration in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy may unfold.

Indeed, Ladson Billings (2019) provokes thinking about cultural loss and cultural preservation in an article titled, “Who will survive America? Pedagogy as Cultural Preservation.” The title itself suggests that the specter of cultural annihilation is ever-present. In order to escape its constant haunting, the desire for preservation of culture could perhaps smother the tacit, also ever-present knowing that culture is indeed mutable. Ladson-Billings clarifies that cultural preservation is a “deliberate attempt to maintain elements of a culture (since) . . . students need a strong sense of their roots, heritage and performance on the world scene” (pp. 298 - 299). The rhetoric of “maintenance” and a “strong sense of roots” is obviously somewhat counter-intuitive to the call for fluidity and mutability that we have discussed in the earlier section of Ladson-Billings work. The anxiety over one’s history disappearing, especially in a hostile political context where change is ruthlessly forced upon one, may be met with a determined effort to maintain what one has not yet lost and to restore what once was.

This need for restoration is also articulated in an article titled, “I’m Here for the Hard Re-Set: Post Pandemic Pedagogy to Preserve Our Culture.” Ladson-Billings (2021b) begins this article with a quote by Arundhati Roy (2020). “Historically,” Arundhati says “pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next” (cited in Ladson-Billings, p. 68). The title itself with its analogy of getting a technological device back to factory settings, and an explicit call for cultural preservation seems to run contrary to the spirit of Arundhati’s “breaking up with the past.” After all. A hard re-set implies wiping out collected data and going back to an original pristine condition. The article itself makes the claim that there has in fact never been a pristine

educational experience for African American children to go back to. She describes practices like standardized testing and the way that culturally relevant pedagogy has devolved into static, superficial ways of teaching to show why going back to what once was is not a sound option.

Her call for a hard-reset, however, is made in terms of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy - she asks for a re-deployment of the three core principles which have been neglected. These principles are student learning, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness. In this work, she defines a culturally competent student as being “secure in their knowledge and understanding of their own culture—language, traditions, histories, and so forth” before becoming fluent in another culture (p. 71). The call for security in one’s own culture first, seems at odds with her understanding youth cultures were a “mashup with permeable borders” (2020, p. 28). She also explains the analogy of a “hard re-set” as one that describes what needs to unfold in the classroom to “reclaim and preserve our culture through our school students” (p.72). Here the impetus to reclaim supports the hard-reset analogy and assumes that cultural aspects could and should be retrieved and guarded.

Throughout her work, Ladson-Billings seems to oscillate between the opposing calls for perceiving culture as mutable, and for preserving and stabilizing it, and she seems to believe that both are possible through her approach of culturally relevant pedagogy. While some may claim that this is indicative of duplicity, I contend that this is but the paradox of the human condition itself - a condition that seems filled with anxiety at the openness that could signal a break from the past, and responding with grasping at that which we already know - a hard re-set, a reset that helps us begin again within the security of familiar programs and patterns. Here, Ladson-Billings explicitly links culturally relevant pedagogy to a project of keeping culture “safe.” Is it possible

to keep something safe while allowing for fluidity? What are the implications of keeping safe for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy?

Conclusion

Like keeping culture safe, keeping homes safe has become a major enterprise. Most people think about effective security barriers like walls, fences, and security gates to keep intruders out. These are constantly changing, being upgraded, and reinforced with ever-evolving electronic surveillance systems, barbed wire, or guard dogs. No matter the upgrade and reinforcement, no barrier is impenetrable. Given time, any barrier can be breached. So more and more aggressive or intrusive methods are used to keep the threat out and to offer safety. Keeping a home “safe” via preservation processes, on the other hand, is handled in a more intuitive, artistic, and caring way. According to the Whole Building Design Guide Historic Preservation Subcommittee (2023) preservation “focuses on the maintenance, stabilization, and repair of existing historic materials and retention of a property's form as it has evolved over time

Practitioners of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy should keep in mind that the same dynamic is relevant to understanding culture. Culture can be deployed to “keep safe” through both securing and through preserving processes. Ismail (2015) describes how in the 1800’s culture was deployed to “distract” the English working class from their demands for the right to vote. Following Matthew Arnold, he says, that “(interpellation by) culture would defer, deter anarchy” [the dissolving of privilege for the elite and a more equitable socio-political order for the working class] (p. 40). Following Thomas Hobbes, he reminds that the commonwealth replicates the “distracting” function of culture in its imperative to secure the privileges for the elite and extends the discussion to implicate science in maintaining privilege. He says:

All subjects in the state of nature may be conceptualized as free, even equal; and as contracting, participating in the establishment of commonwealth; but attaining science marks some, an elite; makes them superior, leaders of the rest; makes commonwealth not so much a contract between equal subjects as the study, pursuit and establishment of security; serving the interest, effectively, of the leisured, educated, propertied class. (p. 46).

When there is anxiety about losing that which we are familiar with, when it threatens our sense of control and certainty, then it seems that our tendency to secure is activated. This move towards securing appears to be more aggressive and could be complicit in maintaining inequitable socio-political conditions. As shown earlier in this chapter, Warren implicates our ontological uncertainties in the continuing anti-Blackness. Preservation, on the other hand, seems to stem from a sense of curatorship, from wanting to deepen understanding, and allows for appropriate change and “evolving.” Responding to the nuances of the somewhat contradictory features of stabilization while allowing for evolving over time may be central to the practicing of a more meaningful Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. These dynamics which are evident in the work of Ladson-Billings, as discussed above, are also evident in the works of Heidegger, Warren, Ani, Mika, and Kuhn. How, then, should our thinking be to continue to practice in ways that allow for preservation, rather than for securing? How should we orient ourselves to culture so that we can allow for change and mutability of culture in ways that would never-the-less preserve understanding of culture. Further, keeping Ismail’s connection between transforming culture and colonization, how do we practice in ways that would offer spaces for decolonizing? These are the questions taken up in chapter 4 of this project.

CHAPTER III: SEEING CLEARLY CLOUDS OUR THINKING

Introduction

Ladson-Billings' lifelong project, formally recognized with the publication of her influential book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (1994), continues to expose racism's pernicious effect on the education of African American children. It also continues to describe what good counter-teaching would look like. Since 1989, she has worked to craft a pedagogical approach, which she calls Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), to address these inequities.

While she remains committed to countering these obstacles that emanate from racist socio-political structures, in 2014, she expressed her dissatisfaction with how CRP had been unfolding in classrooms. She explains, "In many courses on multicultural education, students learn about static images of cultural histories, customs, and traditional ways of being. However, culture is always changing" (p. 75). As I explained in Chapter one, my emphasis added, Ladson-Billings also describes her discontent with "a static conception of what it means to be culturally relevant." Many educational practitioners appear to be "stuck in very limited and superficial notions of culture (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 77). Since Ladson-Billings' concern is with our conception of culture as being unchanging, this project has chosen a philosophical reading of the problem.

Despite Ladson-Billings (1994, 2001, 2003, 2011, 2014, 2021 a) repeatedly emphasizing that culture is always changing, classroom practitioners continue to have static, superficial conceptions of culture. This project, then, as explained in previous chapters, describes how our current inclination towards finding intelligibility only in what is steeped in scientific ways of knowing, most likely makes it difficult, maybe even impossible to conceive of most things, as

having any degree of fluidity or subtlety. Now, consider for instance the “CSI effect” that impacts the legal process. A study by the National Institute of Justice supports the claim made by many experts in the legal field that watching television programs like CSI has caused jurors to demand increasingly “hard evidence,” just like they see in the CSI television series. The study found that 46% of the respondents demanded DNA, fingerprint or ballistic evidence. One prosecutor was even accused by jurors of doing a shoddy job because his team failed to fingerprint the lawn (Shelton, 2008). Ladson-Billings (2021 b) finds this increase in a demand for empirical evidence in education as well, as evidenced by the acknowledgement that what is currently knowable, or intelligible in social science is “grounded in the standards for knowledge production that have developed in the physical sciences, in which the main purpose of research is seen as seeking universal ‘truths generalizations one can apply to all—‘totalizing schemas’” (Gordon, 1997 and Keto, 1989, cited in Ladson-Billings, 2021 a, p. 90).

Martin Heidegger’s (1977, trans.) work expresses a similar concern about our current totalizing mode of thinking, a mode that he describes as being a technological, or calculative way of thinking. He cautions against understanding “calculative” in the narrow sense of performing number operations. To calculate, he elaborates,

is not a reckoning in the sense of performing operations with numbers for the purpose of establishing quantitative results; but, on the contrary, mathematics is the reckoning that, everywhere by means of equations, has set up as the goal of its expectation the harmonizing of all relations of order, and that therefore ‘reckons’ in advance with one fundamental equation for all merely possible ordering. (p. 170)

We tend to order things, ideas and people in the world according to an overarching formula, even before we have had a chance to encounter them in their uniqueness. Carl Mika

(2017), a Māori scholar, whose indigenous scholarship extends Heidegger's thinking, reiterates the pervasiveness of a calculative way of thinking, as he reveals that our desire to eliminate unpredictability sees us wanting to stabilize everything that we encounter. He concurs that:

Numbers become important because they can describe the thing-ness that is already known. What is crucial is first that the world is approached as a predicted ontology and numbers are then assigned because they are the only means of describing that positivity. This occurs, however, because we have preordained the world as something and have made ourselves *certain* [my emphasis] subjects in that act. (p. 92)

Both Heidegger and Mika speak to Ladson-Billings' concern about "totalizing schemas" in their description of our calculative way of thinking that "harmonizes all relations of order" by making everything predictable, pre-ordained and known to such an extent that we become "certain subjects" who feel more secure in the conditions of our existence. This need for certainty and the misinterpretations that we allow ourselves to engage in to ensure some semblance of control, could impede our conceiving the fluidity that is inherent to the conditions of our existence. Heidegger and Mika both contrast our hyper-calculative way of being that creates predictability and security with a way of being that is comfortable with unknowability.

In this chapter, I explore the implications of both this scientific orientation of knowability-on-steroids and an orientation to the unknown for two key practices of Ladson-Billings' Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. These key practices are storytelling and cultural immersion. Drawing on Heidegger's description of comportment and Mika's description of worldedness, I make the inference that much about our experience in the world lingers in the murkiness of unknowability. However, not only are we expected to share as if we have full access to a clearly knowable, articulable experience, but also our listeners are oriented to the

sharing in a mode that grants credibility only to that which can be made fully graspable, predictable and transmittable. If this is so, to what extent is it possible, then, to participate meaningfully in sharing of experiences through storytelling or cultural immersion, in a context where the expectation is that we have expert knowledge about an experience?

By focusing on Heidegger's description of *comportment* and Mika's description of *worldedness*, the first section of this chapter gives a philosophical reading of the complexities involved in cultural immersion. The next section explores the complexities involved in storytelling. To do this, I focus on the process of listening, and I draw on Johnathan Lear's (2006) and Carl Mika's description of indigenous view of *imaginative listening*. I extend our thinking about listening by introducing Heidegger's *ontological implications of listening*.

Heidegger, Comportment and Unknowability

Heidegger (1982, trans) reminds that comportments "relate to something: they are directed toward this" (p. 58). In our everyday involvement, we are directed towards things, people and ideas in the world; we relate to them as we become absorbed in the activities that give meaning to our lives. More importantly, for Heidegger, we are directed towards these things in ways that reveal our responses to the experience of ontological anxiety. Heidegger identifies three possible ways of comporting, or responding to the unsettledness that comes with the anxiety-ridden realization that being is actually nothing but an interpretation (see chapter 2 for a discussion on ontological anxiety and nothingness).

Heidegger proposes that because "Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it can, in its very Being, 'choose' itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only 'seem' to do so," (1962, p. 68). This delineates the three ways of comportment, or three possible ways in which we respond to our nothingness and openness. Let us look in a little more

detail at one of the ways of comportment. Ladson-Billings (2011) describes teachers who even after training are unsure of what they should do and eventually default to regular routines and practices and insist on being told step-by-step what should be done. Heidegger may say that these teachers who simply follow societal expectations lose themselves, and never win themselves. Dreyfus (1991) may describe them as comporting “from the public collective way of not owning up to (themselves), of covering up (their) unsettledness” (p. 26). The attempt to cover up the unsettledness, may translate to a classroom practice steeped in static notions of culture, where “most teachers feel bound by static concepts of the curriculum and knowledge...and external standards govern how they teach (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 139)

A detailed discussion of all three ways of comporting is not relevant for the focus of this paper. I limit the discussion to Dreyfus’ observation that our everyday comportment is one of “averageness,” of following societal norms. For the most part, our comportment unfolds as a “mindless” involvement in the world. It is this everyday “mindlessness,” or tacit knowing that informs a reading of Ladson-Billings’ storytelling. If everyday comportment is informed by tacit knowing, then the effectiveness of storytelling as a means of experience-sharing becomes more complex, especially in a context that has come to expect clarity and explicit explanation.

Dreyfus, in his interpretation and analysis of Heidegger’s thinking, describes this mindless involvement as everyday coping skills, or a “self-less” awareness that comes with adept coping (p. 3). Let’s look at LeBron James for example. As one of the most skilled basketball players, he must surely have watched the play of dozens of skilled players before him, he must surely have watched and reflected on his own play, he must surely have studied in great depth statistics and commentary. Perhaps, he has even studied kinetics, speed, velocity and other measurable components. When he is in the court, all that he has studied matters at the very same

time that it doesn't matter at all. In the flow of the game, intuition drives what already has been practiced; intuition allows for passion, strength, knowledge, and skill to meld together in awesome synchrony. In watching the practice of many highly effective and successful teachers, a similar flow is evident.

Perhaps Ladson-Billings' (1994) explanation of the debriefing of the teachers' classroom practice could give us some insight to what Dreyfus means when he says that we go about our daily activities in self-less awareness until we are forced into a stance of deliberation. The teachers in Ladson-Billings' original study often gathered to discuss videotaped snippets of their classroom practice. Ladson-Billings says, "the basic premise was *contrary* [my emphasis] to the suggestion that expert teachers operate on an intuitive or automatic level. The study assumed that, in the presence of other experts, teachers are capable of explaining and defining the exemplary practices that they observe" (p. 179). Even though Ladson-Billings suggests that expert teachers do *not* in fact operate on an intuitive or automatic level, the fact that their practice can be brought to their conscious attention *only* when watching a recording and when discussing with others, is indicative of precisely the deeply intuitive way in which these experts are involved in their everyday practice.

Heidegger's "absorbed coping" may be akin to the automaticity described above. The mind of Heidegger's description cannot be separated from the things in the world. These things and activities become intelligible through a non-thematic absorption in the activity with which we are busy. In the example of the teachers, it is only when they are forced to discuss their practice that they become aware of their actions. In fact, up until they review the recording of their practice, we can infer that they become so absorbed in what they are doing that the equipment, or the ideas involved in their activity become transparent.

Transparent may be taken to mean invisible, but Dreyfus, honoring Heidegger's original meaning of "durchsichtig," uses it to mean "see-through" or "clear" (p. x). Dreyfus, says that when we are using equipment in our everyday comportment, the equipment tends to "disappear" (p. 64). He goes on to say that "precisely when it is most genuinely appropriated," (p. 65) equipment becomes transparent, and we are not aware of the equipment having any characteristics at all. Like LeBron James, or the teachers described above, when experts are in the flow of play, they are oblivious to the movements that they make, or the equipment/ ideas that they are dealing with yet can skillfully follow through with the next move in the sequence of play. Actions like these are what Heidegger calls absorbed coping. When there is skillful implementation and smooth functioning of equipment, the awareness of equipment recedes into transparency as we become absorbed in the activity.

For instance, when we look out through the passenger window, as we ride through a city, the window is totally visible, yet we do not "see" it. When we play "I spy with my little eye....," we most probably look with all intensity at the glass, without even seeing the glass. However, if at a red stoplight, a street vendor rapped on our window, the rap will most likely call us to foreground the glass that would otherwise have remained an unseen background. We may be thankful that it offers us protection from the insistent vendor, or we may be irritated that it stands in the way of making a quick purchase. Either way, the tap on the window forces us to respond to the thing (the car window) that we were previously "unaware" of. So then, an event that calls to conscious attention, or makes us deliberate on the thing that had previously become transparent can indeed allow for the information that had disappeared into the background to reappear. But could this be true for all lived experiences? Can a conscious deliberation about

cultural habits call to our conscious attention the tacit understandings that allow for everyday mindless involvement?

Consider the following then: if at a conference, we are called upon to inform about our culture in terms of what is considered polite, courteous, or respectful in one-on-one interactions between people, we should surely be able to respond, just as we respond to the glass when the vendor raps on it. If cultural understandings form the background of all intelligibility, if Dasein's everyday absorbed coping becomes "unthought" (Dreyfus, p. 66) when we operate from a mode of deliberation, then such a direct request to contemplate these understandings should surely bring our background knowledge to the fore. This stance should make it possible for cultural understandings to be brought to the foreground, and to be shared in an explicit way.

But Heidegger may say that even after theoretical or deliberate reflection, it may *not* be possible to make these background understandings explicit, and it may not be possible to share these tacit cultural preferences through practices like storytelling. Unlike the car window that becomes part of our conscious attention, the background information that informs our comportment remains in the background. The impossibility of bringing this information to our conscious attention may arise because understanding is not in our minds, but in the implicit ways in which we comport or involve ourselves in the world. Dreyfus says, "... even when mental content such as rules, beliefs, and desires arise on the available level, they cannot be analyzed as self-contained representations ... Deliberative activity remains dependent upon Dasein's involvement in a transparent background of coping skills" (p. 75).

Consider another example. When we type on the computer, we have the implicit background knowledge that is our comportment. Even when we type painstakingly slowly, we may see each word crawling across the page, and see each idea come to fruition, without even

being aware of the movement of the fingers on the keyboard. But once we foreground this understanding, that is, once we try to make somewhat explicit the knowledge of key placement and finger movement that once allowed for absorption into the act of typing, we suddenly lose our fluency. We now cannot help but look at the keyboard to see how the fingers seek out the keys. We may realize that we type with only one finger, we may even try the recommended “asdf” placement of fingers that we learned when we first started typing; our eyes may no longer be on the words on the screen, rather they may follow the movement of the fingers. With this approaching awareness of finger movement comes fumbling and searching for the keys, inaccurate typing, loss of fluidity of movement and loss of fluidity in thought. This deliberate action, Heidegger (1962, trans) says, like absorbed coping, remains dependent upon Dasein’s involvement in a transparent background of coping skills. However, once we foreground the background, we lose the sense of what we were going to say or do in the first place. Attempting to make this background explicit can lead to a disruption in the everyday comportment of Dasein.

In terms of culture, then, it may be impossible to make explicit the understandings that inform our comportment, and any attempt to do so may result in the loss of the fluidity with which we comport ourselves in the activities that that our culture makes available to us. These activities appear to be self-interpretations that make long term sense and whose sense perhaps cannot be explicitly clear to us in a momentary kind of way. The absence of the long-term sense, or what Heidegger may call the “referential whole” is perhaps why Ladson-Billings finds a dilution of meaningful practices when teachers think that perfunctorily “adding some books about people of color, having a classroom Kwanzaa celebration, or posting “diverse” images makes one ‘culturally relevant’” (2014, p. 82).

When, for example, I am asked by a group of teacher counselors, who want to understand my culture, to talk about responsibility for the elderly in my culture, I may tell them that placing the elderly in homes is unacceptable and will be met with the scorn of the community. I may tell them that there is no such concept of emancipation from parents, that living with parents is not considered a shame, that you are expected to live with them to take up their responsibilities and to lessen their burden. But even this would be inadequate in talking about how I comport myself as a child, or how I comport as a parent. Attempting explicit sharing of cultural aspects, in other words, could find us fumbling on the keyboard of cultural details as we attempt to write the story of the roles into which we have been socialized. Dreyfus says that we cannot “capture what (we) simply know how to do when socialized into for-the-sake-of whichs” (p. 95). Each role, he reminds, is a set of practices and each practice connects with an equipmental whole.

In such absorbed coping with equipment, our comportment is informed by all the experiences of past events. Dreyfus says that our “comportment manifests dispositions that have been shaped by a vast amount of previous dealings” (p. 68). Dasein, he says, does not understand every specific, individual item in its environment. Instead, it understands the environment as a whole context, and has a preliminary understanding of its everyday workings. In referencing the work of Heidegger to explain this, he says that “Equipment - in accordance with its equipmentality-always is in *terms of its* belonging to other equipment: inkstand, pen, ink, paper, blotting pad, table, lamp, furniture, windows, doors, room (p. 62). Cultural beliefs too function in a nexus of other beliefs. If, as Heidegger says “there ‘is’ no such thing as an equipment, if as he says, “To the being of any equipment there always belongs an equipmental whole, in which it can be this equipment that it is” (cited, p.63, Dreyfus, 154), then identifying specific culturally relevant information like responsibility for the elderly or beliefs about death and grieving may

indeed be problematic for it may be somewhat impossible to meaningfully isolate these from the whole nexus of beliefs into which one is socialized. Heidegger's nexus resonates with Mika's (2017) work, in particular with his focus on worldedness, which informs the next section.

Carl Mika: Unknowability and the Worldedness of Things

Mika draws on Māori philosophy to emphasize that a western metaphysics cannot account for the intricate nexus within which things (people and ideas) exist for one thing is never alone; "everything is constituted by something else" (p. iii), even though the something else may possibly remain invisible. Not only are we as human beings connected to each other, but according to Māori indigenous ways of knowing, we are connected to the natural elements, as well as to the mystical or supernatural.

Mika illustrates this interconnectedness by referencing the Māori word "Whenua " which is understood to mean 'land' The word also means 'placenta' and carries with it the implication that we cannot think of land and afterbirth as two entirely different meanings. He says, "When thought of with an irrational twist, afterbirth corresponds with the notion that whenua (land) gives rise to, sustains and claims its entities" (Thrupp and Mika, 2012, p. 209). This linking of the meanings of whenua, for example, shows that trying to extricate and discuss just one aspect of this intricate intertwining gives us a very superficial understanding of the relationship between things in the world, including human relationships with entities. He extends his discussion by describing how things come before and recede from our consciousness. He says, "As one thing presents itself to me, others with it may appear or hide. Even if I cannot perceive them (which I can't) we can be assured that they are there" (2017, p. 4). He goes further to explain what a thing is, describing it from a Māori perspective as a world because, "although it presents itself as

individual, it is composed of all other things in the world. ‘Things,’ in turn, may be beings, ideas, histories and experiences” (p. 64).

Heidegger states that our ability to make sense of things comes from our absorbed involvement in the world, what Dreyfus calls our “mindless coping.” Mika extends this by describing how tacit and complex this involvement is. He explores two different orientations to what he calls an event of sense-making. The first orientation is rooted in western ways of knowing and prioritizes knowledge that can be used to categorize and label things, and to separate things into discrete knowable entities. This orientation values eliminating unpredictability to have ultimate control. It premises the ideal relationship between things on predictability, measurability and knowability. The other approach, associated with indigenous ways of knowing, frames the ideal relationship as remaining mysterious, resisting closure, and repelling complete knowledge. This approach unfolds from the acceptance that the relationship between things is elusive, fluid and unknowable. Mika (2017) says, “Being foreshadows the overly empirical focus of measurement; it stands behind the entities, making them comprehensible for a time, but overall, unknowable” (p. 36).

Therefore, there is always a sense of mystery, and things remain fundamentally unknowable. Mika (2017) helps us understand how mystery and unknowability are embedded in Māori epistemology by elaborating on the multiple meanings of “Ako” which has come to be understood as teaching and learning. The three meanings of Ako are as follows: (1) To learn, teach, instruct, advise (2) Split, have a tendency to split (3) Move, stir (Williams Dictionary, 1921, cited in Thrupp and Mika, 2011; Mika, 2017). Mika elaborates that the unknowing that is inherent in Māori epistemology is sustained by this tendency to link seemingly incompatible ideas. It is this union of apparently disparate ideas that adds to the mystery, ambiguity,

speculation and unknowability that is central to Maori epistemology. He says language reveals “its hidden relationship with mystery and interconnectedness through its incongruent meanings” (p. 61).

Thrupp and Mika (2011) speculate about the “splitting” that is associated with teaching and learning. Māori indigenous epistemology, they infer, insists that the self is in a deeply woven relationship with all other entities such that the ego is somewhat ‘chipped away at’ by the other phenomena. Hence, the self understands itself as being constituted by other elements in the world and can never extricate itself from these phenomena in the world. With reference to the third meaning, Ako hints at humans being moved, stirred or provoked as a result of the things in the world. Mika insists that the human teacher is somewhat incidental to the process of teaching and learning, but that the things in the world are integral to it. The emotional aspect of learning is linked to the understanding that the human capacity to make sense of things in the world is complicated by the unknowable workings of the things in the world, and from the fundamental lack of control that results in mystery which leaves the self perpetually in wonder and awe. For the possibility of meaningful learning to unfold, Mika speculates that the learner may even need to abandon the need to learn about the object and instead involve themselves “with the deep uncertainty that comes from a lack of knowledge about it, brought about because of the thing’s self-retention...” (p. 62). Interestingly, Ladson-Billings (2011) says that she opts to provide “practice-based examples to remove some of the mystery and mythology tied to theory that keep teachers from doing the work designed to support high levels of achievement for poor students of color” (p. 33). Perhaps this is an indication of the contrast between western and indigenous thinking, as pointed out by Mika.

Mika's reminder that things make themselves present at the very same time that they "unshow" (p. 47) themselves, demonstrates that the self, along with other things in the world, is a participant in what is not present. The only certainty is that everything is worlded or connected to everything else. This approach stresses that nothing is ever fully present to our consciousness. It stands in stark contrast to the scientific discourse of western metaphysics which suggests that everything in the world can be quantified, categorized, described, and known. In describing the encounter with things in the world, Mika (2017) says, "I am no more familiar with any one thing than if I had never encountered it (p. 4). This acceptance of not ever being able to fully know something stands in contrast to the classical western idea that a thing has rigid properties that make it what it is. Such a non-flexible approach, Mika points out, forces objects to be caught up in a static "thereness"- where everything is fully present, examinable, and knowable. This is what he terms a metaphysics of presence.

These differing styles of orientation to the world (protecting mystery and unknowability and ensuring knowability) become significant to Ladson-Billings' work. They are especially significant to her proposal that cultural immersion and storytelling could create meaningful spaces for understanding the lived experiences of different socio-political or cultural contexts. We need to ask some crucial questions of the encounter with people whom we hope to get to know better. What is our orientation towards the encounter? Are we expecting these encounters to have a result of making another person or culture more knowable? If we realize that we can never fully know another person, or if like Mika does, we "reach the limits of our ability to say much of the other" (p. 4), do we then say that the encounter is a failure? According to Mika, the western way of knowing, which insists that we get clear about everything, and everyone is so pervasive that we approach all things, including other human beings with the intention of making

clear, grasping, and revealing something concrete about them. Mystery and unknowability have become weaknesses that need to be eradicated.

Mika (n.d) elaborates on the complexities of “getting to know you” practices like cultural immersion and storytelling. He says if we wanted to learn from a Māori elder, we may find that our inquiry could be hindered by the elder wanting to know how we orient ourselves towards the world. The elder would be more interested in “Where do (we) *stand* in relation to the world? Are (we) too eager to know? Do (we) seem thrilled by the prospect of closing a circle, of finding a solution, and are (we) therefore, in a sense, not present?” He goes on to say that that the elder may ignore the questions being asked as the elder “makes their own inquiry into the existential nature of the visitor ” (<https://www.thephilosopher1923.org/post/where-do-we-stand-when-we-know>, para 14).

The next section, then, deals with our existential nature, and how our inclination to “close a circle” could impact the encounters that come with Ladson-Billings’ storytelling and cultural immersion? In the next sections I introduce Ladson-Billings’ description of cultural immersion and storytelling, and I frame these practices through Heidegger’s description of *tacit understandings* and *comportment* and Mika’s description of *worldedness*.

Ladson-Billings and Cultural Immersion

Teacher training programs generally place student teachers in classrooms to give them the opportunity to become familiar with classroom procedures and routines, and to give them a space for the practice of teaching strategies. However, most educational settings operate within the framework of white middle class norms (Ladson-Billings, 1994, Emdin, 2016) so, in effect, student teachers get practice in reinforcing the dominant social context. To counter this, Gloria Ladson-Billings and Christopher Emdin, who references her work, advocate for placing student

teachers in African American communities. This placement could help teachers come to a deeper understanding of social factors that adversely impact on access to goods and services, health care facilities, police and fire protection, and playgrounds. If however, like Heidegger says, our more meaningful ways of being are informed by tacit background understandings, and if like Mika says our understandings cannot be disentangled from the nexus wherein they exist, how could we possibly learn from practices like immersion and story-telling?

According to Ladson-Billings (1994), teachers should not just experience immersion, but they should be “systematically required... to have a prolonged immersion” (p. 146) in African American culture so that they may learn the home language, social interaction patterns, histories and cultures. She says,

Immersion in the community to learn who the community leaders are, where the community centers are, which people command respect, what matters to the children in the community, all provide teachers with needed information about how to work with, rather than against community. (p. 147)

Mika may say that the community leaders, community centers, the people who command respect and what matters to children are all worlded, or inextricably connected to everything else in their communities such that they could not be understood as these discrete entities. He may also caution against conflating the more tangible, concrete things with those that are less concrete and tangible. For instance, it would surely be easy to determine where the community centers are, if you were just looking for the building. However, it would be more difficult to comprehend the less tangible aspects that went into making it a community center, just as it would be more difficult to determine how some people come to command respect, or what respect even means, or how some things came to matter to children. Mika (n.d) clarifies:

In Māori philosophy, there is a particular allegiance to the idea that all things in the world are interconnected. This totality or “the All” includes everything that has ever existed and will exist, along with visible and invisible realms. Of all first principles in Māori thought, this is the most enduring and frequently mentioned. (para 2)

Conflating the way different things come before our consciousness puts everything on the same plane of perception. In a western context where the empirical is more valued, it is highly unlikely that immersion experiences will allow for the consideration of what Mika calls “the invisible.” Our scientific orientation that creates the epistemological expectation that all things will be explicitly available for us to make sense of is more likely to deny the vital role of the invisible. This study draws from Mika to understand that the invisible encompasses the nothingness, supernatural, ideas and memories. It also draws from Heidegger to understand the invisible as the tacit knowledge, or the background knowledge and skills that we have. Of course, this is not a finite listing of what could be described as invisible.

The idea of the invisibility of background knowledge and skills, as well as the complexity of worldedness can be illustrated by the following story retold from Christopher Emdin’s (2016) book, *For White folks who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education*. Christopher Emdin references Ladson-Billings’ work and echoes the idea that teachers need to broaden and deepen their cultural experience beyond traditional classroom interactions by immersing themselves in the local communities. As a teacher-coach, he describes the teaching style of a young White teacher who repeatedly failed to connect with his largely African American students. In comparison an African American teacher seems to have “magical” interaction and engagement. He says, “The first word that came to mind when (he) saw the collective agreement and energy in the room was *chuuuch!*” (p. 48). Emdin realized that

the White teacher needed more than coaching; he needed to see what this “true engagement looked like” (p.49) so he invited the teacher to his church. After sensing the teacher’s discomfort at being the only White person at church, Emdin collected videos of Pentecostal preachers, and watching these became the basis of his coaching sessions with the teacher. Emdin says,

We undertook a closer study of the subtleties... paying special attention to the preacher’s voice inflections, the role of music in setting a certain tone, the flexibility that the church attendees had to sit where they wanted, the types of responses the preacher generated at different parts of the service, and the way the preacher led the service without commandeering it. (p. 52)

Mika may caution Emdin against assuming that the “magical” qualities of the African American teacher, or the true engagement of the preacher could be distilled into practices that could easily be emulated in any meaningful way. The belief that this can indeed be done may be symptomatic of the western colonial belief that everything can be transmittable and knowable so that everything could be harnessed for our consumption. Heidegger calls this making everything into standing reserve- a resource for utility. Mika may counsel that the practice of these “experts” comes from “a wellspring of infinite connections and co-constitutive realities that are beyond our perception but that we are nevertheless indebted to” (p. 7). In doing so he would be drawing our attention to the fact that the “spirit” of these meaningful encounters are embedded in every other facet of the lives of the successful teacher and the preacher - this is what he alludes to when asks us to think about everything as being worlded. Heidegger may say that this “immersion,” especially the reference to “subtleties” shows that Emdin is indeed aware of how complex and tacit our comportment can be. Emdin could have chosen to give the teacher a list of

rules to follow. Rather he allows the teacher to observe and discuss these more tacit aspects of Pentecostal preaching.

Taylor Carman, who comments on Heidegger's work in Ruspoli's (2011) documentary, says that a person who acts with expert mindlessness, like the preacher does "confronts the concrete situation" and does what needs to be done because he is "responsive to it, and in tune to it" and therefore has a spontaneity that you don't get if you "insist on falling back on rules, principles, procedures, and the generic formulas" for how to deal with situations (38:40). While Emdin's coaching may seem to be good practice, we must consider to what extent spontaneous actions could unfold in this context. If the teacher was uncomfortable with being the only White person in a church, how much more would his discomfort be with trying to embody deeply intuitive practices of the Pentecostal church? Both Heidegger and Mika would indeed problematize the notion that the nuances of such being could possibly be emulated, especially after watching a few videos.

Hiroshi Sakaguchi, who also features in Ruspoli's documentary, is a master carpenter in Japan. He alludes to the complexity of learning-by-watching when he claims that during his apprenticeship, his teacher taught him nothing directly. He just had to patiently watch, many times over, and sometimes the learning came out of nowhere, for example, while he was cleaning the sawdust off the floor. Sakaguchi alludes to the practice of simply patiently waiting for a moment of learning. This gives us a glimpse into what meaningful learning from another would look like - nothing is explicitly shared, nothing happens within timeframes, and learning happens when one is least expecting it. Heidegger and Mika both may call this being-always-open to the calling which unfolds in the most unexpected of ways.

Like Sakaguchi noted, moments of meaningful learning present themselves unexpectedly, and cannot be contrived or rushed. We have to wonder, then, to what extent practices like immersion and storytelling could offer spaces for these moments of meaningful learning. In the current educational context these experiences are planned to fit into the demands of a curriculum which has obvious time-constraints. Furthermore, in the current learning context based on western pedagogical practices efficiency is determined by how quickly learning happens, and by an input-output logic. In this context waiting for this moment of learning to call unto us may be deemed non-productive - and production appears to have become the main goal of education. Ladson- Billings (2006) illustrates the production aspect of education when she observes that the requirement for cultural immersion “becomes just another hoop through which students jump to earn a credential. Students in these circumstances regularly speak of “‘getting over’” their diversity requirement (p. 42).

In addition, the transparency and worldedness of equipment, including information, makes learning from another almost impossible, especially if we are oriented by western scientific approaches that demand explicit, measurable entities. But let us assume for a minute that such intuitive and embedded expertise could indeed be transmitted, learned, and emulated in the current epoch of measurability and certainty. Would that give rise to other complications?

To illustrate my point, let me introduce you to a White teacher who was part of Ladson-Billings’ (1994) original research project. Ladson-Billings describes her as having an African American “culture of reference” (p. 32). She offers details of this teacher's life to explain what she means: the white teacher socialized almost exclusively with African American people outside of school and she was so “conversant” in African American “dialect” that she was sometimes mistaken for an African American when she spoke on the phone. In addition, she had

lived in the local community all her life and she and one of the African American teachers had gone to school together in that district. Ladson-Billings seems to speak in approving terms of this teacher's African Americanness which connect her to the community, and in effect, to the children. Her immersion seems to be an authentic embodiment of some of the African American ways of being and seems to have community recognition.

Now consider Rachel Dolezal who self describes as transracial. For years, Dolezal had changed her physical appearance and created a false history so that she could identify as African American. When this became public, she lost her jobs as the chapter president for the Spokane NAACP and as instructor of Africana Studies at Eastern Washington University. (Millner, 2017). She explains her "transracial" identity as follows:

I feel that I was born with the essential essence of who I am, whether it matches my anatomy and complexion or not, ...whiteness has always felt foreign to me, for as long as I can remember. I didn't choose to feel this way or be this way, I just am. What other choice is there than to be exactly who we are? (para. 3)

Despite her claim that she just is, that she has no choice but to be exactly who she is, and that whiteness has always felt strange to her, her belonging to the African American community has been met with scorn and rejection. Her claims do seem indicative of what Heidegger would call skillful embodiment and authenticity, yet Milner asserts that Dolezal will never have the "soul of a black folk." (para. 5). How, then, can we account for her rejection from the African American community? Heidegger reminds us that even in our most authentic moments, when we comport ourselves in ways that show we are dealing with our nothingness in new and unique ways, we remain totally conditioned and anchored by cultural and community ways of being. We appropriate things from all around us and we create something new within the parameters of

societal or cultural norms, otherwise something unintelligible would unfold. Perhaps Dolezal is an example of this unintelligibility. Dreyfus and Wrathall (2017) who build their work upon Heidegger's description of comportment and involvement explain as follows:

...in engaging in a practice, I am taking upon myself a particular status. Social recognition of this status is often a constitutive condition for being able to participate in practices. Consequently, gatekeeping mechanisms are frequently employed to protect that status. Without social recognition of one's status as a legislator, for instance, saying "yea" in the legislative chamber is not an action of voting within the practice of lawmaking. The enthusiastic fan who runs onto a soccer pitch during the game cannot score a goal, no matter how many times he kicks a ball into the net. (para, 7)

Intelligibility comes from a community dialogue about what it means to be this thing or that. Without community recognition, authentic ways of being and a claim to identity may be meaningless. The teacher in Ladson-Billings' research seems to have this recognition; Dolezal does not. Granted, Dolezal is an extreme example of what could best be called cultural appropriation, yet it is one that we need to be cognizant of. No matter how skillful Emdin's teacher became at Pentecostal Pedagogy, if he could become competent, he would still have to negotiate recognition and acceptance with his school community.

The practice of immersion then is complicated by the impossibility of learning from practices that at their most authentic remain tacit and worlded. Mika and Heidegger both may say that in the current context where we orient ourselves to everything as if it is a graspable entity that can be commodified, immersion may lose its pedagogical power. Mika would say that immersion could offer meaningful spaces if we allowed for mystery to prevail - if we allowed ourselves to engage with an "astonishment at the unknowable," rather than try to force the

unknowable into a knowable entity. Mika cites Otto (1958) who breaks mystery down into “awefulness”, “overpoweringness” and “energy” which all sustain “a feeling of uncertainty and vulnerability” (p. 65). Mika advocates that these categories may be useful to keep in mind when we are thinking about the teaching and learning process, or the self’s implication by the world. Perhaps approaching cultural immersion with this in mind, would make our experiences more meaningful.

Ladson-Billings and Storytelling

Ladson-Billings locates her work within the Critical Race Theory tradition and in her article, *Just what is Critical Race Theory and what's it doing in a Nice Field like Education?* (1998) she explores the power of storytelling. In this section, I join her in exploring the power of storytelling, and ask to what extent storytelling could indeed be transformative given that the listener remains conditioned by a western epistemology that values an explicit, measurable truth. I am informed by the work of Jonathan Lear (2006) and Carl Mika (2017) who offer an indigenous focus on *imaginative listening* that may offer an opening for a different teller-listener relationship. In addition, I refer to the ontological implications of Heidegger’s *listening* as a possibility for orienting to storytelling in a different way.

Critical Race Theory validates storytelling or experiential knowledge as a means for interrogating social inequities. Ladson-Billings (1998) makes us aware that “stories provide the necessary context for understanding, feeling, and interpreting.” In comparison, the “ahistorical and acontextual nature of much law and other ‘science’ renders the voices of dispossessed and marginalized group members mute” (pg.13). Here, Ladson-Billings alludes to the idea that law aligns its practice with so-called verifiable science to hide its biases and to masquerade as neutral, universal fact. Science has also been co-opted by classical western metaphysics to

promote a version of truth that is factual, verifiable, and indisputable as *the* version of truth. Likewise, Law professes that it too is built on these qualities. Critical race theorists maintain that it is vital for minority cultural experiences to peel back this veneer of scientific indisputability so that a common history of racial oppression can be exposed. Ladson-Billings lists parables, chronicles, stories, counter-stories, poetry, fiction and revisionist histories as genres that read against hegemonic “scientific” discourses.

One of the most important reasons for ensuring that marginalized experiences and voices are centered in transformation discourses is that “reality” is socially constructed. Although Law prides itself on universal principles, the experience of racial inequities is historical and contextual. Listening to experiences, seeing patterns of oppression, and making inferences about social structures as we listen to stories about racism can move labels of the emotional and the personal, which is often associated with being false, or less trustworthy.

Changing the genres whereby truths are told allows the storyteller to be intuitive and connected to the experience. But what about the *listener*? Does it matter much if the listener remains conditioned by a western epistemology? Such a listener would most likely expect that stories make an experience clear and fully present, and that the stories be rooted in verifiable truth. An indigenous orientation to stories, on the other hand, would be cognizant of the difficulty in, or the impossibility of making everything explicit and verifiable.

Listening Imaginatively to Jonathan Lear and Carl Mika

Jonathan Lear introduces us to an indigenous thinking about listening. He relates a story about the Crow’s survival of the absolute carnage inflicted upon them by colonists. Central to this story is the implication that one should listen like the Chickadee does. Lear recounts the experiences of Plenty Coups, a nine-year-old Crow warrior, who had to isolate to prepare to

receive a vision on behalf of the tribe. Upon his return to the tribe, he talked about a voice encouraging him to be like the chickadee - to listen wisely. But what does it mean to listen wisely? For the Crow, listening wisely is an “imaginative activity” (Lear, p. 71). This meant that the elders listened to his retelling of the dream, focused on details of their choice, and interpreted these details in a way that held significance for the anxiety-inducing events of the time.

In a western context, we are conditioned to listen for fact and truth, especially in a life-threatening situation. Listening with imagination seems almost forbidden. Perhaps this is what makes storytelling in a western context mundane, without much possibility for fertility and newness. Granted, Plenty Coups experience was a dream and thus more open to creative interpretation. In addition, it is a given that since his dream experience was on behalf of the community in the first place, his entire telling belonged to the community. But he had the cultural expectation that the elders would interpret his dream as they saw fit and he had the expectation that they would be loving, wise curators of his dream as well as of the Crow tribe. In contrast to this community ownership, storytellers who are oriented by a western way of knowing claim sole proprietorship of their stories and would likely feel disrespected if their experience were to be open to creative interpretation. There is always the assumption that the storyteller owns the trademark to the truth of their experience.

The story of the dream is used cooperatively, with the humble acknowledgment that neither Plenty Coups nor the elders had full ownership of the dream, nor could they fully grasp the meaning of the dream. Significantly, the most important message of the dream is left in uncertainty. Sure, to survive, the Crow had to learn to listen like the chickadee, but exactly how to listen and what to learn to survive was left unclear. Lear observes:

Precisely because they are about to endure a historical rupture, the detailed texture of life on the other side has to be beyond their ken... (dreaming) enables the dreamers to imagine a radically new future without becoming too detailed about what this future will be (p. 76)

Those of us who have been oriented by western metaphysics with its detail driven, measurable impetus would have trouble, not just with the shared ownership of the dream, but also with the things that were “beyond (our) ken.” We are predisposed to valuing explicitly stated details, predictable outcomes, and fully knowable things. Mika says that in this colonial approach, even before the encounter with the unknown, or the other, we have an expectation that the object will be this or that. This expectation “smooths out the object for perception” (p. 85) even before our encounter with it. We posit expected characteristics onto the thing, and then measure how well the thing fits into our expectations. This is how we measure its credibility. Mika says that the scientific discourse, as part of its colonial project of totalization, has supercharged the self to expect that all things can fit neatly into a certain expectation.

Both Lear and Mika describe listening as an imaginative process. While Lear references Plenty Coups’ dream to illustrate the openness with which we should listen, Mika references indigenous, academic research. According to Mika (2017) the indigenous researcher who is gathering data through interviews, listens to the knowledgeable other but then “takes the utterance in another direction altogether than would normally be expected by academic convention” (p.153). Unlike mainstream western research protocol, the indigenous researcher “might think of any number of random associations that skyrocket away from the intended meaning” (p. 153). Mika acknowledges that western postgraduate ethics committees would

object to subverting or ignoring the core meaning of the interviewee's statement. He crafts his response to such concerns thus:

... if a committee is uncomfortable with that method, it indicates a huge divide between indigenous and mainstream ethics, because the creative use of another's utterance – from an indigenous ethical stance – may well be preferable to simply reiterating what was stated. To reiterate and recount is to render banal the essence of the interviewee's language. (p. 150)

Inspired by the poet Novalis, he calls this thinking that veers off from the original “in the wake of another's utterance” where another's thinking is the force that propels our own thinking. In other words, the original sentence is a sentence that “pushes,” that is, these sentences push you to take thinking in a startlingly new direction (2013).

Mika describes the talk-listen pattern in many Western cultures. The expectation is that a response must connect directly with the logic of the original statement. He identifies the pattern of dialogue as: I say something, you answer in correspondence to its meaning. In this kind of exchange “we can rest assured that an objective truth has been at least strived for, and possibly achieved” (p. 135). He shows how a Māori talk-listen pattern may vary from the western expectation. Māori discussants may hear the other's words but leave them behind, and, to the uninitiated, it can seem as if the response has not met the logical components of the initial utterance (Mika and Stewart 2017, p. 136).

Possibly, this mode of listening and responding, one that doesn't “neatly interlock”, but that creates a “mosaic,” could open up a fertile space for storytelling to yield something new. This veering off could address the concern that culturally relevant pedagogy has become too stagnant.

Harkening to Heidegger

Listening, according to Heidegger, has ontological implications. He points out that “Listening to ... is Dasein's existential way of Being-open as Being-with for Others” (1962, trans, p. 206). For Heidegger, being-with is a basic existential structure of Dasein that allows for two ontological conditions. First, it allows for Dasein to feel at home in the world into which it is thrown. Next, it provides a means of escape for the being-open Dasein to flee from the anxiety that accompanies the realization that at its core, it is nothingness.

It is through our involvement with others that we are brought into familiarity with cultural ways that sustain our society or community. Even when nobody is around, Dasein is always under the influence of others in the community because it is always “hearing the voice of the friend whom every Dasein carries with it” (1962, trans, p. 206). Thus, through listening or hearing we glean information that allows for our tacit knowing of the world. Because we learn from others, even when they are not present, the world becomes “so self-evident, so much a matter of course, that we are completely oblivious of it” (1982, trans, 165).

Similarly, when we hear someone else speak, we understand what is said, or “we are already with him, in advance, alongside the entity which the discourse is about” (1962, trans, p. 207). For example, if you know nothing about the game of cricket, you may not understand what the Asher is, or a gully, or the asking rate. However, if you listened to a conversation about cricket, you will not be thrown into total unintelligibility since you already have a grasp of other sports and other words. Even if you listened to a conversation in a foreign language, you would have some background understanding. So listening (to the “they”), which is essential to being-with, provides the background information that allows for Dasein to involve itself “mindlessly”

in the activities that matter. However, this mindless comportment is also complicit in Dasein's forgetting about its true nature, which is its nothingness and openness.

Being-with others allows Dasein to become lost in the everydayness, or averageness, or the "*they*" of our community. Dasein flees from the anxiety that comes with catching sight of its nothingness. It finds appeasement in the familiarity of '*their*' way of choosing, doing, valuing, thinking, saying, and believing because "that's what is expected of 'one.'" This mode of listening, that obeys the "they" is essential for being-with. But it is also a way in which Dasein loses itself by following the norms of a society. However, there is the possibility of another mode of listening that could compel Dasein, if only for a moment, to turn away from the voices of the "they" and to start listening to itself. We have to keep in mind that listening is not just an auditory process through which information is gathered, such as when we listen to the news broadcast. Listening also brings to mind a call for obedience. For example, when an exasperated parent says, "Listen to me right now," the parent is not concerned with the child getting the import of the words uttered. Rather, the parent is calling for a change in behavior, an obedience. But what is it that Dasein must obey, if not the voice of the "they?"

Heidegger (2000, trans.) says that "hearing strews and scatters itself in what one commonly believes and says." This, we can infer, would be a scattering amongst the "they" and the "they saids," that leads to a forgetting of being. But genuine listening, or hearkening, as he calls it, has nothing to do with the "ear and glib tongue" (p. 137). Rather, it means obeying the logos. So then, what is this "logos that has to be obeyed?" Heidegger draws on Greek descriptions to dispel the common notion that the logos refers "to mere speech, word, or doctrine." Rather, he works from the earlier Greek meaning which connects to a group of terms that mean "to gather." (p. 135). Heidegger's concern here is with the ultimate gatherer, namely

Dasein. Dasein or being is “not just one thing among others; it is at the center of the world, drawing together its threads” (Inwood, p. 3e), gathering disparate things into an equipmental whole such that it brings intelligibility.

Heidegger reminds that “those who merely hear by keeping their ears open everywhere and carrying around what has been heard are and will be... those who do not grasp... (2000, trans, p. 137). What is it that is not grasped by those who keep their ears open everywhere, those who try to drown out the call by diving back into the noise of the everyday?

This is us, and in our everyday involvement we tend to drown the tacit understanding that our being is a fluid process, that we have the possibility of opening a space for newness. At this juncture we have to reflect on Ladson-Billings’ practice of storytelling. How would we as listeners as listeners comport to the call? Are we more likely to wrestle with the anxiety that comes with sensing the openness of our being, or are we more likely to flee into the everydayness of the “they” talk?

Conclusion

The questions asked above are important for this study since the first response may allow for Dasein to somewhat come to terms with its openness (even if just for a little while), to allow for spaces of newness, for the fluidity that Ladson-Billings says is missing in meaningful pedagogy. The latter response could possibly reinforce the static nature of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Heidegger would probably reiterate his discussion on logos as a response to the question above. In *Introduction to Metaphysics* (2000, trans.) he shows how the meaning has shifted from the earlier Greek meaning, which suggested a focus on being to its current meaning of speech, or

doctrine. In *What is called Thinking* (1968, trans.), he shows how the word has now become more technologized. He offers the following analysis:

Logic has gathered special knowledge concerning a special kind of thinking. This knowledge... has been made scientifically fruitful..., in a special science that calls itself 'logistics.' In many places, above all in the Anglo-Saxon countries, logistics is today considered the only possible form of strict philosophy, because its result and procedures yield an assured profit for the construction of the technological universe. (p. 21)

If we are indeed orientated to the experience of cultural immersion and to the experience of listening to stories with such a scientific, technological inclination, then it would be highly unlikely that we would orient ourselves to openness and newness - the kind that would offer a space for thinking about culture in a more fluid way.

Mika (2022) would probably draw our attention to our current orientation to myths as stories. He says sure, we still listen to myths but only "for aesthetic or literary reasons." His observation that we regard everything "merely as an object of either inquiry or exploitation" (p. 116) resonates with Heidegger's "yielding of an assured profit." Given our increasingly calculative mode of thinking, what chance then do cultural immersion and storytelling have to be meaningful practices?

Even though Ladson-Billings explicitly explains to her readers why she made the choice to tell the stories of successful teachers in her seminal book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, both Mika and Heidegger may advise that her explanation may not be understood. Ladson-Billings does indeed go to great lengths to ensure that her readers understand that the book is "not a prescription and that it "does not contain lists of things to do to achieve effective teaching for African students" (p. xi) She goes on to further

explain that she is “committed to the belief that just as we expect children to extrapolate larger life lessons from the stories we tell them, we, as adults, can make our own sense of these teachers’ stories about themselves and their teaching” (p. xviii). For all intents and purposes Ladson-Billings could be our chickadee. Her message, conveyed in her thick descriptions of what goes on in the classroom of successful teachers and the stories that she relates about each one, offer signposts for good teaching, but they remain open enough to engender creative thinking.

Despite her clear explanation of why her work remains open and somewhat mysterious she still has teachers complaining that “Everybody keeps telling (them) about multicultural education, but nobody is telling (them) how to do it!” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 30). She responds to these teachers with, “Even if I could tell you how to do it, I would not want to tell you how to do it.” When they look at her in confusion, she clarifies, “The reason I would not tell you what to do is that you would probably do it!” When she senses their heightening bewilderment, she explains, “You would probably do exactly what I told you to do without any deep thought or critical analysis. You would do what I said regardless of the students in the classroom, their ages, their abilities, and their need for whatever it is I proposed” (p. 39).

Her response demonstrates her awareness of teachers’ ways of thinking that demand recipe-like instructions and measurable, predictable outcomes. However, she remains committed to the openness that she promises. Her response also aligns her belief about storytelling with Mika’s thinking. Both value listening as an imaginative act that opens the space for something new to come into being.

Ladson-Billings also encourages teachers to be circumspect about our choices as we move forward with trying to meet the cultural needs of students. She argues:

the first problem teachers confront is believing that successful teaching for poor students of color is primarily about “what to do.” Instead, I suggest that the problem is rooted in *how we think* (my emphasis)—about the social contexts, about the students, about the curriculum, and about instruction. (2006, p. 33)

Again, Ladson-Billings seems to be critiquing western metaphysics that focuses on the whatness, or essence of things or ideas. This focus renders them static. Instead, she asks that we focus on the “howness” of our thinking.

Ladson-Billings is careful to let her readers know that she is telling a story, rather than giving instructions for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. But if as her audience, we are indeed the kind of listeners that Heidegger and Mika describe, then we have to maybe orient ourselves differently. The next chapter invites us to think about our mode of orienting to the world and offers modes for thinking away from the scientific, calculative mode that currently haunts us. Heidegger offers meditative thinking, Mika invites speculative thinking, and Warren and Ani work together to offer an orientation that builds a relationship between thinking and spirit.

CHAPTER IV: THINKING AWAY FROM A COLONIAL BRAND OF SCIENTIFIC

THINKING

Introduction

Ladson-Billings' landmark book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, was published in 1994. Since then, she has come to be known as the leader in the kind of education that aims to meet the cultural needs of students, especially African American students, in a meaningful way. In addition to a focus on culture, she prioritizes two other components of education. She insists on a rigorous, supportive pedagogy that meets the academic needs of students, and she insists on a pedagogy that develops a socio-political consciousness. To date, she remains committed to these three components, as pillars for equity in education. But, Ladson-Billings (2014) expressed disappointment with the static way in which teachers think about culture. In each of the previous chapters of this study, I explained why I chose a philosophical framing for the problem of thinking about culture as a stagnant entity. In this chapter, I continue with the philosophical reading by briefly describing how we came to be the kind of beings who are comfortable with grasping things as static entities. Then, I read the problem of thinking about things, especially culture, in static ways alongside five philosophers. These scholars all invite us to consider whether different modes of thinking could possibly open up spaces for us to bring intelligibility to the uncertain and fluid nature of things. Martin Heidegger (1962, trans.) introduces us to meditative thinking and Carl Mika (2017) invites us to join him in speculative thinking. Calvin Warren (2018) offers us the possibility of centering "spirit" in thinking. Since Warren indicates that he is still "on the path to developing a phenomenology of black spirit" (p. 171), I invite Marimba Ani (1994) to guide us on this path as

we try to develop a link between (black) spirit and thinking. Thomas Kuhn helps us see that change is possible even in what he calls “convergent” thinking. This entire study takes its cue from Ladson-Billings’ discontent as referred to in previous chapters and reiterated here:

I have grown increasingly dissatisfied with what seems to be a static *conception* [my emphasis] of what it means to be culturally relevant. Many practitioners seem stuck in very limited and superficial *notions* [my emphasis] of culture. (2014, p. 77)

Her use of the words “static *conception*” and “superficial *notions*” links her dissatisfaction directly to the kind of thinking which seems to compromise the fluidity that could make culturally relevant pedagogy more meaningful.

In science, Ladson-Billings clarifies, fluidity refers to the “viscosity of an amorphous, continuous substance that assumes the shape of its container (as is true of a liquid or gas).” In racial identity, fluidity refers to “an individual’s ability to move comfortably across identity categories” (2020, p. 23). Each of the thinkers mentioned in the study are located within a specific ethnic identity category: Heidegger is a German who thinks away from the classical western philosophy of his time. Carl Mika, a Māori, draws from both his cultural ways of being and from Heidegger’s thinking. So too does Calvin Warren, an African American who describes the shortcomings of mainstream Black radical movements that are founded on human rights; he locates his thinking within Afro-pessimism. Ani, an African American locates her work in Afrocentrism. These philosophers all “move comfortably” across modes of thinking, while they seem to be rooted in their ethnic “cultural identities.” So then, how can we account for their fluidity in thinking when cultural identity seems to remain stable? Perhaps this is the question to ask if we wanted to address Ladson-Billings concern about cultural loss (as discussed in

chapter 2), while opening spaces for thinking about culture, and thinking in general as an open process. Addressing this fully is beyond the scope of this study, but I would like to make a gesture at addressing this dynamic at the end of this study.

Let us consider this “amorphous” substance of science that Ladson-Billings says can take on the shape of any container. It certainly may be described as fluid, but its fluidity is highly constrained, compared to, say, the water in a river. In a river, the water courses through; even though its path has already been carved by years of water flowing before it, it still has the capacity to carve a slightly different path for itself. Its boundaries remain somewhat pliable, unlike that of a laboratory container. The meaningful cultural pedagogy that Ladson-Billings calls for requires an open flow, somewhat like that of a river, but the best it seems to be allowed is characteristic of liquid that comes to be shaped by the container that holds it.

When teachers are involved in discourse on culturally relevant pedagogy their first concern, according to Ladson-Billings (2006) is identifying the “shape” of their work as evidenced by the major concern about how they should go about doing this kind of work. Ladson-Billings says that she has made clear why “‘doing’ is less important than ‘being’” (p.41) She associates “being” with principles or ethics that guide one’s actions. She explains this by citing examples of teachers’ beliefs and actions. If teachers believe it is their job to encourage academic excellence, then they prioritize a tutorial role, if they prioritize their students’ emotional well-being, then they take on a custodial role for some students. She says, “Eventually, the preservice teachers began to see multicultural education and teaching for social justice as less a thing and more an ethical position they need to take in order to ensure that students are getting the education to which they are

entitled (2006, p. 44). Practicing culturally relevant pedagogy, she concludes “is one of the ways of ‘being’ that will inform ways of ‘doing’ (p. 41). Her separation of being and doing is perhaps symptomatic of the classical western way of knowing which premises itself on a dichotomy that seems to divide mind and body, thought and action. The philosopher who is most noted for helping us to think differently about the relationship between thought and action is Heidegger.

Classical western epistemology describes the mind as an information processor which houses mental content that represents objects in the real world. Our relating to objects is premised on the subject/ object divide, and results in representational thinking. Simply put, this means that we have pre-stored images/ ideas in our minds that become activated when we try to make sense of things. Heidegger’s work dissolves this divide between thought and action and introduces a being that relates to the things-in-the- world by being immersed in and inextricably connected to them. Dasein (human- being), which translates to “being-there” is always already in the world, interacting with things (people and ideas) for a meaningful purpose in a way that reveals its pre-ontological understanding of its being in the world.

This pre-ontological understanding is revealed in our default disposition which is one of concerned involvement or action with things, which Dreyfus describes as being “mindless coping.” (see chapter 3 for a more extensive discussion of “mindless coping”). It is through this meaningful involvement that we tie things together in a meaningful relationship and bring intelligibility to them.

This activity of meaning-bringing includes our capacity to disclose the meaning of our own being. The paradox, he reveals, is that just as we disclose to ourselves that we are

a self- interpreting nothingness - like a gas that has not yet been shaped by a container- we are overcome by anxiety. We shut down the possibility of creating new ways of being, and we seek refuge in pre-scripted ways of being and doing. Perhaps this ontological description helps us understand why teachers complain that “Everybody keeps telling (them) about multicultural education, but nobody is telling (them) how to do it!” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 30).

Warren (2018) may say that the teachers in Ladson-Billings’ (2006) study are indicative of our current mode thinking that brings intelligibility to our experiences. “Being,” he says was once intelligible as an ongoing event that “structures historical reality and possibility.” Instead, being has now been turned into a static object via “instruments of science and schematization” (p. 11). This static object in turn desires step-by-step procedures for everyday doing to counter the uncertainty of existence itself. Hence, the tell-me-how-to-do-it pre-occupation of the teachers described by Ladson-Billings (2006).

So, how could we perhaps explain this transformation of being from an always-in-process-event, or an activity of motion to a static thing? Every epoch, in every geographical region has a different way of understanding how being structures reality, i.e., how it brings intelligibility to things in the world. In the field of history, we normally differentiate between different periods or epochs in terms of specific observable characteristics of each time period. Ask any child, for instance, about the medieval period in western history, and they will most likely tell you about knights. When Heidegger talks about an “epoch”, he does not focus on the observable characteristics of a specific historical period. Rather, he refers to the kind of being that brings intelligibility to these things - what makes them observable in the first place. Perhaps we can say that the being that Heidegger talks about

is like a torch. When we enter a dark room and shine a torch, we focus on the objects, like medieval knights. Heidegger's discussion focuses on the torch itself, i.e. what is that makes these particular objects intelligible to us in the first place.

Since the western way of knowing has become predominant globally, we will focus on intelligibility in a European - western context. Early Greeks oriented themselves to things and people such that their ephemeral, mysterious, unknowable nature was intelligible to them. Later their orientation to the world was characterized by what has come to be known as *poiesis*. During this epoch things were thought to have an innate beauty; like craftspeople who sensed how to work with the grain in wood, they drew out the beauty already inherent in things to sense their true meaning. Following this, came a big shift where Romans saw things as raw material upon which they had to impose their will. This meant that instead of working with the innate grain in the wood, the wood was perceived as an empty chunk waiting to be acted upon and shaped. Then during the rise of Christianity, God became the sole source of imposing shape, and everything was seen as being pre-ordained. Our current epoch is called the technological one where things assume intelligible shape only if they can be quantified and classified by a scientific mode of thinking to make them predictable and controllable (Ruspoli, 2011).

Heidegger frames the western history of intelligibility as one that aims at soothing our ontological anxieties that arise in the face of our nothingness. The history of being reveals that intelligibility shifts from unknowability and unpredictability to imposing our will on things such that quantifiability, stability and certainty give sense to things, and the three poems below exemplify this shift from mystery and tacit understandings to explicit descriptions and quantitative knowing by revealing different modes of orienting ourselves

to the stars.

Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are.
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky (Taylor 1806)

Excerpts from Scientifically Accurate Twinkle Twinkle Little Star

Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star
I know exactly what you are (Stanza 1)
Opaque ball of hot dense gas
Million times our planet's mass
Looking small because you're far
I know exactly what you are ... (Stanza 2)
Fusing sing atoms in your core
Hydrogen, helium, carbon and more
With such power you shine far
Twinkle twinkle little star (stanza 5)
Classed by their spectroscopy
Types named O, B, A, F, G...
Bright when close and faint when far
I know exactly what you are (Stanza 6) (Kregenow and Wright, 2011)

When I heard the learn'd astronomer

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,

When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-
room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars (Whitman, 1867)

This very brief historical account is meant to illustrate how being brings intelligibility to things in the world. Like Waltman's speaker, when we become sick of our current scientific mode of thinking as the only way of orienting ourselves to the world, we too have the possibility of leaving the current epistemological rooms. Heidegger discusses the dangers of a technological mode of thinking, but he also cites the poet, Holderin to remind that "where danger is, grows, the saving power also" (1977, trans, p. 28). As the danger of enframing grows, the threat and pain that it brings becomes more acute and more visceral. This makes us more aware of the danger and opens a space for us to work against this danger. This could be what makes the saving power grow. I'm reminded of a teacher who met with me to discuss how his students' test scores could be used to inform his classroom practice. After just a few minutes he remarked that he was finding it difficult to breathe, that his heart was palpitating, and his palms were sweaty. He just could not see how multiple-choice responses could possibly give an indication of how his students thought, and frankly neither could I. We both thought that it would perhaps be more fruitful if he discussed with his students the thinking process involved in each answer choice. Of course, time constraints do not allow for such meaningful engagement. Our following sessions

ignored discussion of multiple-choice questions and focused on his students' responses to more open-ended responses. Admittedly, this is not educationally sound, since the format of most standardized testing is indeed multiple choice, nor is this anywhere near the kind of openness that is at the core of meditative or speculative thinking, but it is a subtle thinking away from the enframing of multiple-choice questions.

Given this saving power, our discomfort with measuring that which cannot be measured, perhaps we have the possibility of wandering off into new epistemological territory. Indeed, the scholars with whom I converse seem to have found a way of being and thinking that opens spaces for them to wander off from the hold of calculative thinking. It is in the spirit of wandering off together that I offer the work of Heidegger, Warren, Ani, and Mika and I invite you to join me as I make tentative attempts at exploring possible different dispositions to the things in the world. These different dispositions are non-willing thinking, meditative thinking, and a kind of thinking (as yet unnamed) that connects thinking to spirit.

Heidegger and Non-Willing Thinking

In this section I draw distinctions between Heidegger's notions of calculative thinking and meditative thinking. In this technological epoch, things become intelligible to us when their substance (whatness) can be easily measured, when they can be classified and categorized. Heidegger (1977, trans.) uses the word "ge-stell" or enframing to explain how technology puts everything in its place, to form an ordered predictable world. He says, "We now name that challenging claim which gathers man thither to order the self-revealing as standing-reserve: Ge-stell" [Enframing] (p.19). Thomson (2010), who reflects on Heidegger's work, describes our increased propensity for disclosing things in a way that makes it seem "natural to arrest a being's

dynamic manifestation, freezing it into a preconceived permanent presence” (p. 317). This is true whether we are involved in the disclosure of stars, people or culture.

“Gestell” which roughly translates to “enframing” could be explained as follows: Let’s say that you made a call to someone significant in your life - just for a social conversation. Let’s say that you first must go through an automated system that forces you to choose one of five possible areas of conversation and when you select one of these, you have to further select one of five possible options to narrow down the scope of your conversation even more. That is what enframing is- limitations placed on how we respond to the openness of our being. Rupert Wegerif (2022) references the research on “learning loss” during the pandemic to illustrate how enframing works in education. The focus of this research was the calculation of how much this learning loss would impact on the economy in decades to come. The fact that no research was done to draw inferences about how being unable to go to school led some children to a more profound encounter with Being and further discussing if this sort of encounter was not perhaps more authentic learning. He asks, “How much calculable learning on standardized tests is equivalent to one lightning flash of insight into the nature of being?” (para. 7). This illustrates that what is considered worthy of knowing is already decided in advance, and in this age of technology, it has already been decided that only what can be quantified and harnessed for profit is worthy. Wegerif cautions that we could end up losing even our own awareness of ourselves as anything other than a “standing reserve” for economic productivity.

Modern technology, Heidegger says, has always already decided for us that the most important questions to ask are all about calculating and measuring. He draws his examples from nature and says that instead of nature being a mystery to be related to, it becomes a “standing reserve” of resources to be used by us for rational economic ends. In light of our desire for

certainty, and its increasing reliance on science to obtain this security, we may not come to that epistemological space where we can let what is, just be, where we can be open to wondering about the nature of things, rather than confidently declaring, “I know exactly what you are.”

Heidegger may describe the calculative thinking that is characteristic of the Kregnow poem as being “thought-poor” or “thoughtless” because “we take in everything in the quickest and cheapest way, only to forget it just as quickly, instantly” (1959/1966, p. 45). Calculative thinking in itself may not be problematic. After all, it is a special kind of thinking that is vital for specific purposes, for example, in a medical emergency we may need to make decisions based on investigations and planning, and we need to be sure that we can “count on definite results” (p.46). The problem is that we have come to fail to recognize that calculative thinking is just one mode of thinking. Instead, we have come to believe that it is the only mode of thinking that can be validated, and we accept that our need for calculated certainty is our default disposition to the world.

In *Conversations on a Country Path* (1945/2010), Heidegger explores meditative thinking, which is in contrast to calculative thinking. He creates a conversation between three participants who are walking down a path. The conversation centers around the essence of thinking, and circulatory dialogues are illustrative of how thinking would unfold if it were to be freed from the input-output logic. The condition of *gelassenheit* is central to the circulatory nature of meditative thinking. A very simple way of understanding *gelassenheit* is as releasement toward things and openness to the mystery (Pezze, 2006).

It is also important to remember that *gelassenheit* is a condition of non-willing thinking. Heidegger chooses non-willing rather than will-less because *gelassenheit* must be thought of as

“radically beyond the domain of the will” (Davis, 2010, n.p.). The idea of non-willing never-the-less appears to be a paradox, as indicated by the conversation below:

Scholar: Yet thinking, conceived of in the traditional manner, as representing is a kind of willing... thinking is willing, and willing is thinking

Scientist: The assertion that the essence of thinking is something other than thinking, then, says that thinking is something other than willing.

Teacher: That is why, in answer to your question as to what I really will in our meditation on the essence of thinking, I replied: I will non-willing. (Heidegger 2010, n.p.)

The idea of willing non-willing is emblematic of the paradoxical condition of human existence - the willing of non-willing is still under the purview of the will and indicates the almost impossibility of escaping the dominion of the will, yet, according to Pezze, the declaration that “I will non-willing” is the first step towards *Gelassenheit*. However, Heidegger states through the scientist in his conversation that by attempting to renounce the will, we can prepare ourselves for the engagement in “a thinking that is not a willing” (2010, n.p.).

Heidegger does not explicitly explain how we would be able to free ourselves from the insistence of the will, but he structures his conversation in a way that demonstrates how this could possibly happen. As the three participants dwell on the topic of thinking, we notice that they abandon the will to direct the conversation, while remaining fully invested in the discussion. Pezze describes it as the stance of the individual speakers being gradually being abandoned as they focus on what is disclosed about thinking. By willing not to will, we could keep awake for a moment of *Gelassenheit* which can appear at any moment. According to Heidegger, waiting, without expectation, is the essence of *gelassenheit* (2010) as we open ourselves to a moment of possibly understanding the nature of our being. While calculative thinking “races from one

prospect to the next,” “never “stopping... never collecting itself,” meditative thinking must be able to “bide its time, to await as does the farmer, whether the seed will come up and ripen” (Heidegger, 1966, pp. 46 - 47)

The idea of non-willing being essential to releasement, *gelassenheit* and meditative thinking may be discouraging. It seems as though renouncing the will is an almost impossibility. But Heidegger reminds us that even when we are engaged with the thoughtlessness of calculative thinking, we do not give up our capacity to think meditatively. Rather, the capacity for meditative thinking, lies fallow, just waiting for the conditions that would allow it to germinate. His poetically reminds:

Just as we can grow deaf only because we hear, just as we can grow old only because we were young; so we can grow thought-poor or even thought-less only because man at the core of his being has the capacity to think. (1966, p. 45)

Even though we may be forgetful about our capacity for non-willing thinking, our potential for it lies buried like a seed waiting for the right conditions to germinate.

While Heidegger’s discussion of the will and non-willing thinking is limited to ontological implications, Warren’s discussion of the will has more explicit political ramifications. Warren describes how human will has been given a pivotal role in acts of political resistance. Counter-movements like Black Radical Movements have framed the will as a mystical entity that anchors resistance and rebellion, agency, and action. We have come to depend on the political will of the people to reconfigure society. If objects resist, they resist only because objects “can will or activate willing as a feature of existence” reminds Warren (2021, p. 11). But he asks if this will could just be a desire to imitate the dominating will of the colonizing other. His description brings to mind the last scene of Orwell’s *Animal Farm* where “The

creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which.” (p. 35). He describes this will to power as being possibly “a simulacrum, one accomplishing the internecine desire of the Other as the object’s own will” (p. 12) and describes it as presenting a deeper problem of metaphysical violence since it severs the body from being. How then, can we mitigate against this metaphysical violence of the will? Warren offers the spirit as a resource for Black being.

Unlike Heidegger who maintains his philosophical project of remembering being’s potential for openness and newness, and the potential for meditative thinking, Warren sees the need to eradicate the power of being, which is manifested in discourses of Black radical thinking, or Black humanism. Warren (2018) titles the last section of his book, “Adieu to the Human.” In this chapter, he expresses alarm at the extent to which emancipatory gestures depend on the discourse of human rights for their claims to justice. He contends that we have imbued the human with so much value that it now “constitutes the highest value in the world” (p. 171).

Ironically, this value will not shield Blacks against the various manifestations of anti-blackness since in an anti-black world, Blacks have been denied being in the first place. They have been turned into equipment that performs philosophical labor of embodying the nothingness of metaphysics (see chapter 2). For this reason, he believes that it is a conceptual error that being has resources to offer Black being. He cautions that it is a “dangerous fantasy” to ground justice and equality in a discourse of human rights. Therefore, he advocates for “Black studies... to disinvest (their) axiological commitments from humanism and invest elsewhere” (p. 171). Since he sees no solution within a framework of human rights, he suggests that we would need to look elsewhere for resources. He says that there is only endurance. “And endurance cannot be reduced

to ... humanist mandates. Endurance is a spiritual practice with entirely different aims” (p. 172). His turn to spirit comes from his thinking about how Blacks endured the horrors of slavery.

Clearly, they did not turn to the being's power. According to him, it is the spirit that allows for endurance, and it is this spirit that he wishes to reclaim. He says that he is still “on the path to developing a phenomenology of black spirit,” but what he calls for is thought to be rendered unrecognizable. How this should happen still needs to be worked out. He does make a call for “thinking to provide noetic waves of uncertainty and impasse.” When spirit moves upon these noetic waters, we should find the place to reconstruct thought as a practice of spirit” (2021, 33:00). He contrasts the idea of the groundedness of being to the “mystical waters” upon which the spirit moves, as a way to represent the fluidity of thinking that he envisages will come from the association of thought with spirit. Warren’s struggle to think away from the will which he inevitably ties to Being echoes Heidegger’s call for a releasement - a noetic openness.

Since Warren is just beginning with his work that recognizes spirit, I turn to Marimba Ani (1994) for more guidance on the place of the spirit in African ontology. She describes spirit as the source of all energy, motion and cause and effect. Like Heidegger’s being that unites all phenomena, Ani’s spirit unites all things in the world. For her, knowledge comes through the relationship with the universe and through perception of spirit in matter. Like Heidegger, she too is critical of western ways of knowing. She identifies Plato’s distinction of the detached, reasoning subject from the knowable object as the root of western estrangement from the cosmos. This separation, she explains, “is at once the key that opens the way to ‘knowledge’ as conceived by the European and the key that locks the door to the possibilities of the apprehension of a spiritual universe” (p. 30). If this is so, then it is going to take much more than Warren’s separation of being and thinking to re-imbue a disposition that can find intelligibility in

spirit. Could the opening that *gelassenheit* seems capable of offering open this door to the spiritual universe? If we looked up the word in a modern English/German dictionary, we would find that “*Gelassen*” is the past participle of the verb “*lassen*,” which means “to leave [behind]” and “to let [allow]” (Clymer, 2017). Perhaps if we left behind our dualist way of thinking which concerns Ani, and let things be as they are, we could catch a glimpse of the spirit that Calvin describes as being essential to the thinking that helped an oppressed people endure.

In our technological age, only that which can be objectified and controlled is intelligible. The history of being shows how it has been co-opted by a scientific mode of thinking to eradicate all uncertainty and unpredictability. Ani describes the stabilizing force of being with the observation that if you “Rob the universe of its richness, deny the significance of the symbolic, simplify phenomena until it becomes mere object, ...you have a knowable quantity” (p. 56). It is this desire for knowability that poses a problem for Ladson-Billings. Turning to spirit as the condition for intelligibility may bring the fluidity that could make her pedagogy meaningful. However, spirit has become so entangled with religious connotations that that in itself would pose a major hurdle, especially as it pertains to education.

In the Shadows with Carl Mika

Like Ani, Mika also includes the spiritual in his approach to thinking. In an indigenous context thinking unfolds a set of complex, unlimited relationships that remain unknowable. This idea has similarities to Heidegger’s nexus of things, or *equipmentality*. The implication for thinking is that even when we are directly relating to a concrete thing, we need to be open to everything else to which it is linked. While Heidegger reminds us that our thinking unfolds from our concerned involvement in the world. Mika extends the concept of the world by including one’s ancestors and forthcoming generations. Even if they are not currently directly involved

with the self, they have the ability to “constitute what one thinks” (p. 40). This relation to spirit allows for speculative thinking which contrasts with “a precise, rational” way of western thinking (p. 40). Mika is careful to note that indigenous thinkers lose credibility when they are considered too mystical. In explaining why anything associated with spirit or other realms is devalued, he indicts enlightenment thinking which deems that anything that cannot be empirically observed and quantified is an illusion.

Mika also makes reference to the disposition called “Whakaaro” (2016, p.796). This disposition makes a thing intelligible by keeping it in the shadows rather than thoroughly clarifying it. The shadowiness encourages a speculative thinking that is open and fluid, unclear and mysterious. Mika says that this orientation forecloses “against making assertions of certainty about things in the world” (2017, pg. 68). This disposition makes numerous possibilities intelligible, even as it maintains an unknowability of the things.

Another aspect of Maori thinking is the worldedness of things. Mika calls this the “collapsed nature of things” (2017, p. 51) which may be expressed as the intricate links between all things. Things don’t exist on their own, rather they exist as a nexus and this makes knowability impossible. The unknowability is described as an “ethics of the dark” (2021, p. 426), through which ideas unfold in malleability and spontaneity, and destabilizing forces keep certainties in check. But he laments western ways of knowing have forced a procedural and tightened version of knowing. This corrals speculative thinking and corrals the openness that may allow for culture to be conceived of as being a fluid entity.

Conclusion

It’s understood that when you speak of that which is “relevant,” you speak of something pertinent to the matter at hand, or if you are familiar with British English, you may say the matter

“in hand.” According to the etymology dictionary “hand” words tend to originate from root words that all mean to seize, take, collect, or guard and protect. Let us consider the last term – protect- for on the surface its common meaning has positive connotations. However, protect according to the etymology dictionary means “defend, cover over, cover in front.” In terms of culture, eurocentrism has “covered over” the ways of being of indigenous people globally, yet this covering over cannot be thought of as a benign form of protection.

My mother tongue (and I wonder if that would have been Tamil – the language of my grandparents, or Zulu – the indigenous language of my homeland) has been covered over by the English language. The philosophies behind even the most tangible of rituals have been covered over by Eurocentric ways of being, and the ability to articulate an epistemology or a way of thinking that I could claim as my own, has been covered over. I still often find myself inarticulate, mute as I second guess thought processes, terrified that a close analysis would leave me exposed as a colonized thing, filled with nothing but imperialistic ways of being and thinking. What can I, then, hope to offer communities who see culturally relevant and linguistically relevant pedagogy as being vital to academic success, to a sociopolitical consciousness and emancipation, or perhaps to a cultural revitalization in the face of cultural devastation? I find myself constantly reminding myself that I probably still have the potential to fulfill the purpose of what Macaulay calls “a class who may be interpreters between [the supposedly superior English] and the millions whom (they) govern” (cited in Ismail, 2015, p. 63). I find dealing with the experience of my own colonization, together with the fact that I in turn have to potential to act as a substitute proponent of the Eurocentric project to be extremely disorienting. In addition, my position as an outsider (my state issued documents categorize me as

a South African Indian) to the professional communities in which I am involved makes practice even more bewildering.

My most meaningful teaching experience was at a small charter school where most board members, as well as the school director, were direct descendants of members of the Black Panther movement who framed the institution's mission around social justice imperatives and had overt strategies to ensure that these were prioritized in every day pedagogical encounters. At the time, most students identified as African American and despite attempting to build a whole school practice on the principles of culturally relevant education, it seemed as if students remained disengaged from some practices. For example, all teachers were trained to use a call and response pedagogical style because of its resonance with cultural practices of the Baptist churches in the South. However, most teachers, even teachers who themselves were active members of the Baptist church reported little student engagement with the call and response. In many other instances too, for example when discussing the use of the N-word, students articulated the sentiments of “that is not how we feel” or “that is not who we are” or “we don’t think like that.” With reference to the N-word, school administration and staff were open to listening to students about how the use of the word had evolved, but they were adamant about not allowing the use of the word. Students felt that their voice was not being heard.

Another almost parallel teaching experience unfolded on Navajo tribal lands. Here, there was a great push for culturally and linguistically relevant education which became synonymous with cultural revitalization. Students expressed very similar feelings about their lessons- feelings of being estranged from the language and from some of the cultural content, and of being forced to learn that which resonated only with the elders of the tribe. In addition, there was resentment towards the local Chapter’s policy that only Diné could be spoken at chapter meetings - many

students felt that this was a way to silence young voices and maintain the status quo, while elders believed that this was a way to ensure that the traditional language and practices could be rejuvenated. Hence for tribal elders it had emancipatory potential; for the youth, it was yet another form of marginalization, this time inflicted by their own leaders.

These experiences made me realize that even when students shared a cultural, racial, or ethnic background with staff, there was still contestation of ideas. This does not mean that I can luxuriate in the casually dismissive attitude that being culturally relevant is difficult for everybody. In fact, I find it even more incumbent upon me to hold myself accountable. Uppermost in my mind remains the question of how I could practice in ways that are built on principles of equity and justice? How would I practice without simply replacing one ideology with a more politically correct one? Is it sufficient that principles of justice and equity are endemic to my practice?

I have used with some success the following questions to guide classroom discussions. “How does this lens reinforce stereotypes or challenge them? What does this lens highlight, and what does this lens make difficult to see? What questions does this lens invite us to ask, which emotions does this lens touch, and on whom does this lens call to act?” (Kumashiro, 2009, p. 720). For example, a teacher assigned an assignment that was based on any civil rights/ social justice issue. A male student decided that he was going to discuss Andrew Tate who he said was a champion for men’s rights. The student was angry that the teacher had refused to accept his proposal for the assignment. In my one-on-one conference with him, I introduced Kumashiro’s questions as guidelines for our discussion on whether his choice could be acceptable. By the end of the discussion, he did have a more cooperative attitude, was willing to broaden his discussion so that he could address Tate’s sexist views and could talk more openly about why he believed

that young men were being disadvantaged to the extent that they needed a men's rights movement (as he believed). His proposal, which was based largely on his anger brought on by personal experience opened the space in the classroom for discussions on gender issues. Once he felt that he was being heard, he was more willing to do the research on gender issues; even though he kept the focus on Tate, he was able to show to some extent where and why he disagreed with him. The assignment itself may not have gone as planned in that he focused on someone who clearly trends on social media because of his misogyny. However, the student and some of his friends now regularly stop by my office when they have no classes to discuss various issues that they see trending. They are more open to changing their views when they hear each other, and I sense their struggle with coming to accept that competing viewpoints can indeed coexist.

Opening spaces for students to struggle with competing ideas is an anomaly in my teaching context. Most teachers ask students to complete multiple-choice questions because it lends itself to more efficient grading, and it allows for a more efficient data analysis. Where extended responses are expected, teachers generally have clear cut acceptable responses. There are no places for ambiguities or uncertainties or for trying out a response.

This is what Heidegger may call enframing. Enframing is the way of revealing of our epoch, that is, the way we are oriented to make sense of things in the world. Enframing brings intelligibility in ways that try to provide security and certainty, not just of responses to classroom assignments, but of existence through a "keeping safe" that controls, manipulates and calculates. On the other hand, there is meditative, or speculative thought which lovingly curates thinking, or preserves it without an attempt at domination. The idea of securing and preserving has been discussed more fully in chapter 2. In this chapter we consider whether keeping the essence of

something safe could result in the kind of stabilization that concerns Ladson-Billings.

In *A Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger says “All essencing endures.” Then asks, but is enduring only permanent enduring?” (p. 30). Lovitt tries to clarify Heidegger’s meaning by giving a detailed etymology of the verb *gewahren*. This normally means “to be surety for, to warrant, to vouchsafe, to grant.” He goes further to discuss the verbs *währen* (to endure) and *wahren* (to watch over, to keep safe, to preserve). He translates Heidegger’s conclusion as “only what is granted endures.” In other words, only our mode of revealing, our being endures and not the beings that are revealed. If we go back to the torch metaphor that we used earlier, then it would be the essence of the torch (being) that endures and not the essence of the things that are illuminated by the torch.

Carl Mika (2016) clarifies that we generally think of essence as a “common underpinning to a number of phenomena.” But Heidegger, he says, uses essence to mean “an action which is an enduring.” Mika goes on to explain that in our current epoch, what endures is our mode of revealing, which is “*Gestell*” or “Enframing.” Mika is quick to note Heidegger’s observation that “It endures to the extent that it is granted to endure” (p. 63-64). In other words, Mika explains “only what is granted endures.” He goes further to clarify that because of this primal origin of what grants the enduring power of enframing, there is also a ‘saving power.’ I take this to be that being has a primal origin – in one epoch being revealed itself and the things that it illuminated as being open and always on the way to becoming. Granted the chance, being could always catch a glimpse of that openness again even in a context where scientific and calculative ways of thinking hold sway.

Thomas Kuhn identifies two modes of thinking that perhaps could add depth to our understanding of scientific thinking. Thus far we have associated the scientific thinking of our

epoch with calculative thinking that aims to stabilize, manipulate and control. But Kuhn (1978) reminds us that there is scientific research that seeks to add to our current understanding and there is science that aims to dominate and harness nature. Even the brand of science that is motivated by increasing understanding does not need only “flexibility and open-mindedness” for discovery. He suggests that “convergent thinking is just as integral to scientific advance as is divergent” (p. 226). Scientists must have knowledge of the content that precedes before leading to new discoveries. He reminds that most discoveries and inventions in the sciences are usually “intrinsically revolutionary” and explains that this revolution is because of re-evaluating the old knowledge, re-ordering and assimilating with the new ideas. For this reason, he says, scientists need to “simultaneously display the characteristics of the traditionalist and of the iconoclast” (p. 226-227).

Surely teachers who practice culturally relevant pedagogy also may see themselves as both traditionalists and iconoclasts. Their practice could curate the cultural understandings that their students bring to the classroom, while simultaneously creating a space for interrogation of those cultural ways of being, especially when cultural ways impede on socially just ways of being. For example, culture is often used to justify sexist and homophobic beliefs. Like scientists, classroom practitioners should create spaces for change and fluidity. But unlike the fluidity that Ismail (2015) associates with the dominating power of colonialism, the change brought about by culturally relevant pedagogy should open spaces for being to endure in the sense that Heidegger and Mika describe. These spaces could allow for students to face the uncertainty and nothingness of their being, to grapple with anxiety that space engenders, and to work out new ways of being for themselves, while still embedded in the culture of the community. Heidegger’s anxiety (discussed in chapter 2) could be what Kuhn (1962) calls “a

crisis” (p. 62). He describes the emergence of new theories as being “preceded by a period of pronounced professional insecurity” (p, 68). He goes on to say that the failure of old rules engenders the need to search for new ones. In science then, the anxiety or crises becomes a productive energy that is directed towards new scientific thinking. Philosophically speaking anxiety has the potential to open spaces for new ways of being. In so far as it pertains to culturally relevant pedagogy, practitioners should work in ways that open spaces for students to glimpse the possibility that current cultural ways of being may need to be interrogated. Because we have invested so much emotion in culture, such potential for interrogation could be risky since the first inclination could be to accuse practitioners of disrespecting students’ cultures.

Taking our cue from Kuhn’s criticism of how science lessons unfold, we can extrapolate a way forward for working in culturally relevant ways. He says that students are given a model that the scientist has already created, and then they are asked “either with a pencil and paper or in the laboratory, to solve for himself problems very closely related in both method and substance to those through which the textbook or the accompanying lecture has led him” (p. 227). Preston (2008) who discusses Kuhn’s work explains why such teaching is problematic. “Science never forgets its heroes,” he claims, “but it does forget how they, and the scientific communities of which they were members, came to achieve what they did” (p. 15). It is this forgetfulness that gives the appearance that science unfolds through consensus, that one answer has always existed. If teachers want to take culturally relevant pedagogy seriously, then they have to engage in the explicit discussion of the tenuousness of knowledge, that what we know and how we know what we know does not endure endlessly.

While Heidegger links endurance with the revealing-as-open possibility of being, as discussed in an earlier section Calvin associates endurance with spirit. Ani would probably agree,

explaining that “a universe understood totally in materialistic, rationalistic terms will discourage spirituality. An ethos characterized by a will to power, by the need to control, will derive pleasure from a technical order (p. 250). Her technical order resonates with that of Heidegger and his enframing as revealing. Once again, we see that perhaps there is a space for *gelassenheit*, a space for letting go within the thinking of Calvin and Ani.

Most thought-provoking for me is Ani’s thinking that seems to at once embody the paradox of being static and being open. She notes.:

The spiritual is the foundation of all being because the universe is sacred. The universe was created (is continually recreated) by a divine act. We participate in that act as we perform rituals in imitation of the Creator and aspects of the Creator (Olodumare and the Orisha, Onyame and the Abosom, and so forth). Through association with this sacred universe, divinely created, life itself becomes sacred and a most precious gift to be cherished, preserved, passed on and revitalized. It is to be lived to its fullest. (p. 252)

The reference to the rituals being an imitation of the named Gods immediately had me associate rituals with a static practice aimed at security. However, she insists that even in imitation the universe is “continually created.” She then brings into congruence terms that I would have previously considered to be incongruent: preserved, passed on and revitalized. Perhaps this is the nuance that I had previously missed – that preserving does not render static, that passing on need not be controlled and manipulative, that imitation can be revitalizing.

I am suddenly reminded of the famous Michelangelo painting, *The Creation of Adam*. In this painting God and Adam both have their arms outstretched, fingers not quite touching - God seems intent on passing the spark of life from his own finger into that of Adam but there remains a gap and would signify a space for renewal and revitalization.

Perhaps this is what I have been missing in my reading of Ladson-Billings thus far. When she cautions those who embark on a culturally sustaining pedagogy to be “vigilant and steadfast...and to (guard) against the degradation of the meaning and the implementation of the term” (p. 82), I read her caution about keeping, or protecting or guarding against “spillage” as an act of securing. Perhaps, looking at it, and by extension any pedagogical encounter, as an act of preservation would open a space for the saving power that can counter the static concept of culture that concerns Ladson-Billings.

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