

Decentering Whiteness in the Pedagogy of Agriculture

Introduction

In our agriculture and food systems, white men control the means of production, cultural norms, and distribution of power. This systemic control is historically rooted with the privileging of white farmers over Indigenous populations, African slaves, African American sharecroppers, Hispanic farmers (Telles and Ortiz, 2008), and Asian farmers (Danbom, 1995; Hurt, 2002). Currently, this control is evident through a variety of white dominated systems, such as the reliance on cheap Hispanic labor in production agriculture (Street, 2004; Meier and Ribera, 1993), white cultural proclivity of organic agriculture (Guthman, 2008), and the patriarchal nature of agriculture and subordinate role of women (Murphy and Venet, 1997). These systematic mechanisms are not unique to agriculture; Whiteness is dominate in the culture of the United States (Omi and Winant, 1994). Whiteness refers to the broad power systems, social structures, and legal precedents which favor white people and disadvantage people of color (DiAngelo, 2016). The historical and modern dominance of whiteness in our agriculture and food systems should not be overlooked in colleges of agriculture. Because of the close relationship between colleges and faculty of agriculture and the agriculture and food systems, these dominant structures are replicated in our colleges, programs, and classes (Archibeque-Engle and Gloeckner, 2016; Archibeque-Engle, 2015; Martin, 2014).

This prioritization of white values leaves people of color, women, and other marginalized populations excluded from conversations related to agriculture work and values. We must find ways to ensure that all people are brought to the forefront of our colleges, programs, and classes. These underrepresented people must see themselves in what we do in agricultural higher education to ensure their success in our institutions and find opportunities in our agriculture and food systems. When whiteness is decentered, underrepresented people become valued and heard in our colleges of agriculture.

This article will explore how to decenter whiteness in colleges of agriculture through curriculum, teaching, and outreach (instruction beyond campus, including Extension work). The complexity of these projects increases with each section as curriculum represents choices of content, teaching requires more training and skill in application, and outreach efforts embody the complex nature of our educational systems and society. Importantly, colleges of agriculture should not necessarily put more weight on one of these three over any other, but instead work to build all three of these intentionally and in unison.

Decentering Whiteness in Curriculum Development

Agriculture curriculum can become a form of whiteness if left unexamined. Because agriculture has been dominated by white men through most of history, the curriculum of agricultural studies has also historically been dominated by white men. This historical reality will lead to a dominance of white males being preeminent in curriculum devices including class examples, theories presented, voices heard, faces seen, and stories represented. For example, when we “start” with the history of agricultural knowledge in the United States with the arrival of

European colonizers and teach that the role of Ingenious agriculture was to help the Europeans survive, then we are centering Whiteness.

The preeminence of white males in our agriculture curriculum is likely because instructors in colleges of agriculture have historically been acculturated to not feature people of color, Indigenous peoples, and women in agriculture. Furthermore, an agriculture instructor's adherence to a color-blind ideology (i.e., someone claiming to not see race) could indicate a willingness to further whiteness in agricultural education. Decentering whiteness in agriculture curriculum requires a serious examination of the content in our courses.

Bringing the voices of people of color, Indigenous peoples, and women forward in agriculture curriculum requires an instructor to map out the curricular devices present in their course. An instructor should list all of the *class examples, theories presented, voices heard, faces seen, stories represented, and expansive timelines* involved in the course. Importantly, placing the devices in order will help the instructor understand when these devices are utilized. Then, identify if these devices are centering whiteness by featuring white males or decentering whiteness by featuring people of color, Indigenous peoples, and women in agriculture. Students need to learn about the authentic significant contributions from marginalized peoples that haven't traditionally been represented. Instructors should aim for at least 25% of their curricular devices to represent the contributions of people of color, Indigenous peoples, and women in agriculture. This percentage is an estimation of good faith. Furthermore, these curricular devices should be interspersed throughout the entire semester. Significantly, an effort should be made to provide some of these curricular devices at the start of the semester to maximize the effects of decentering whiteness.

Decentering Whiteness in Instruction

Inclusive classrooms are spaces where students feel welcomed, valued, and encouraged to grow (Lawrie et al., 2017). As a critical co-creator of this classroom environment, the instructor and *who they are* is a factor in whether or not this objective is realized. A teacher's social identities are a part of this formula, bidden or not. Instructors who know themselves well, and how they are perceived by others, are better positioned to support a learning environment where all students can learn. An instructor's positionality, their own awareness of it, and its impact is the fulcrum of the agricultural classroom that decenters whiteness (Adams et al., 2016; Ambrose et al., 2010; Innes, 2009). Reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self and is critical for instructors (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). In short, instructors who decenter whiteness must know themselves; and must be able to articulate and clarify their biases, assumptions, experiences, and social identities before the instructor can effectively support the social identities and learning in a diverse classroom.

This self-awareness may feel clumsy and burdensome in the beginning. One may feel as though they go through a list of identities to consider how instruction will impact different identities and this may in fact be what one has to do in the beginning. Ongoing engagement with this critical reflexivity, though, will soon become a part of the way that an instructor prepares for class. For example, when teaching an experiential learning activity, such as a commodity exchange or a fistulated steer laboratory, do you provide clear definitions for words, even ones that you consider to be common vocabulary, or do you assume that students share similar background experiences? A reflexive instructor may first provide context about where and how they learned about commodities, fistulas, or steers. It would also be helpful to bring in examples about how some Indigenous communities, as communal societies, view commodities or how animal ethics are viewed in the Latinx or African American communities (Goodman, 2001).

As an instructor gains mastery, they will be able to engage in other reflexive strategies. For example, a teacher can minimize the impact of their biases by having students write their names on the last page of tests or assignments so that the instructor is unaware of whose paper is being graded until the score is marked. It is also important to consider student identities in group work, to support equitable effort and learning (Summers et al, 2005). A teacher who decenters whiteness explicitly names the social identities of authors, inventors, historical figures, etc. to create space for the idea that people with historically marginalized identities have always contributed to agricultural knowledge; it's helpful to put photos of these agriculturalists in presentations and posters (Banning et al., 2008; Archibeque-Engle, 2015). An instructor who routinely practices reflexivity will also be able to name areas where they have overcome a bias. All of these practices will decenter whiteness.

Decentering Whiteness in Outreach

Just as Whiteness has dominated school-based agriculture education, it has also dominated outreach and Cooperative Extension services. Historically, county Extension agents mostly worked in rural, white counties, establishing personal relationships within the community in order to deliver educational programs. This was important work for rural America and continues to be today, with an Extension office in or near all of the 3,000 counties in the United States (Hiller, 2005). Land grant institutions and Extension were conceived of in order to bring equity, education, and agricultural support to the states they serve, but this hasn't been achieved equitably or with our increasingly diverse population in mind. Being able to engage with underrepresented communities and their unique issues will decenter whiteness and equitably bring agricultural outreach services to everyone.

This work is varied and will look differently depending on the unique populations being served, so an example of one population is provided here: Extension services in Indigenous communities. While Extension offices are found in nearly 100% of US counties, they can be found in a tiny percentage, only 4%, of Indigenous communities (NCAI, 2010). The forced removal of Indigenous people from their land, agricultural systems, and foodways along with the assimilation of Indigenous people to white European systems of agriculture has alienated them from their food production and associated culture, increasing the need for support in reviving their traditional food systems.

When engaging with Indigenous communities, it is important to consider how the disparate worldviews of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples affect what is taught, valued, and prioritized. Because of this, the pedagogy used needs to take Indigenous communities' unique social, cultural, and racialized position into account, particularly around the issues of colonization. Scholars have called pedagogies of this kind various things (critical Indigenous pedagogy (Denzin et al., 2008); Red Pedagogy (Grande, 2008)), but all emphasize the importance of Indigenous voice, knowledge, and praxis to inform pedagogy. Pedagogy must seek forms of practice and inquiry that are emancipatory, promote decolonization, and embrace the contributions by Indigenous scholars to decolonize Western methodologies. The work must represent Indigenous people without stereotypes and honor their customs, rituals, and collective agency. Successful collaborations will approach issues with cross-cultural competence, provide access to resources, be responsive to the needs of the community, and share power to reach common goals (Nichols and Kayongo-Male, 2003). This is just one example of outreach in underrepresented communities, but viewing agriculture in a more multidimensional way, that values different ways of knowing and forms of agriculture, can be applied to outreach in many settings in order to address issues in an inclusive and emancipatory way.

Conclusion

We want to reemphasize that these three facets (curriculum, instruction, and outreach) need to be viewed individually as well as in totality. The work for those trying to decenter whiteness in college of agricultural must be aware of how whiteness can permeate curriculum, instruction, and outreach in their context and be ready to speak truth to power in their institutions.

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