

## Chapter 5

# Speaking with Trunks, Dancing with the “Pink Elephants”: Troubling E–Racism, E–Classism, and E–Sexism in Teaching Multicultural Teacher Education

**Christine Clark**

*University of Nevada Las Vegas, USA*

**Gwen Stowers**

*National University, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter takes a contrary view of the “meta” aspect of meta-communication (where meta is defined as “behind” or “beneath”) in the online multicultural teacher education classroom, arguing that such communication inhibits learning about (content) and through (pedagogy) sociopolitically-located multicultural teacher education by enabling e-racism, e-classism, and e-sexism to operate in largely covert manners in the distance education context. Accordingly, this chapter contends that digital meta-communication on issues of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and sex/gender needs to be “de-meta-ed” or made explicit in order for the kind of liberatory reflective conversation on these topics to occur that is foundational to the adequate preparation of PK-12 teachers to effectively educate all students.*

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will discuss how race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and sex/gender come up or come “through” in online communication. We examine the “appearances” of these dimensions of identity from the lens of how we, as online faculty, “see” them, and how they manifest in online course discussions in student-to-student communication.

More specifically, we define the problem of e- or electronic racism, e-classism, and e-sexism as a meta-communicative (less than fully conscious), yet “dancing pink elephant” (figure 1) (blatant) in the online multicultural education classroom from the perspectives of how faculty perceive students’ race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and sex/gender identities, as well how these identities become “transparent” in student e-conversation.

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*Figure 1. Dancing pink elephants*



## BACKGROUND

This chapter draws from/builds on three meta-communicative concepts. First, it engages Charles Lawrence’s view that race and class are meta-communicative or covert conversational topics because they are “forbidden” (2005). Second, it connects to Mark Lawrence McPhail’s notion that direct or non-meta-communicative dialogue about race is “(im)possible” or exceedingly difficult to meaningfully realize (2003). Third, it intertwines Paulo Freire’s idea of “false generosity” in exploring the extent to which the meta-communicative aspects of e-racism, e-classism, and e-sexism can be surfaced in order to effectively and consistently develop PK-12 teacher disposition to teach from an ever-deepening critically conscious, sociopolitically-located multicultural educational point of entry across the curriculum (1970).

In “Forbidden Conversations: On Race, Privacy, and Community” (2005), Lawrence, an African American, describes a conversation he had with a white colleague about public schools. The conversation took place shortly after Lawrence’s colleague moved to the Washington, D.C. area, where Lawrence already lived. The colleague asked Lawrence to recommend a “good” school for his children. Lawrence uses this conversation to illustrate the meta- or forbidden nature of

conversation about race and class even between Blacks and Whites from the same socioeconomic class background, in this case the upper middle class. Lawrence argues that in asking for such a recommendation, his colleague was *really* asking him to tell him where the predominantly white, upper middle class schools in Washington, D.C. were, but without expressly stating so. Accordingly, Lawrence answers his colleague’s question by referring him to areas of the District where all the public schools were predominantly white and upper middle class, instead of directly engaging him in a conversation about how he defines what a “good” school is and why. Lawrence analyzes this conversational exchange as a pre-choreographed conversational dance that he and his colleague had been conditioned to do with one another when issues of race and class emerged. Lawrence goes on to articulate that dancing this dance is the normative manner of communication between people from different racial groups in the United States when issues of race, and class as it pertains to race, emerge.

In essence, Lawrence is describing what Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) has characterized as a form of “border patrol”-like behavior that emerges when people approach situations (borders) in which honest engagement with each other might lead them to meaningfully bridge-the-gap between them

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