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Addressing Equity in Teacher Education

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The Flat World and Education, Linda Darling-Hammond's most recent book (2010), addresses one critical issue our country faces in its commitment to educate all children well. What she calls more "powerful learning" (Darling-Hammond, 2006) requires schools to focus on specialized knowledge and skills that reflect the changing nature of work. She asks whether or not we are ready to provide the education needed for more complex skills for all children, not just some children. To respond to this call for more powerful learning, teacher educators have a responsibility to transform programs and classroom teaching so that beginning teachers engage children in learning more complex skills. The core of this call to action is equity. How will we teach our preservice educators to understand that when we

> teach across the boundaries of race, class or gender, . . . we must recognize and overcome the power differential, the stereotypes and other barriers which prevent us from seeing each other. Those efforts must drive our teacher education, our curriculum development, our instructional strategies and every aspect of the educational enterprise. Until we can see the world as others see it, all the educational reforms in the world will come to naught. (Delpit, 1995, p. 134)

Delpit's warning is a strong message to teacher educators, particularly those of us in independent colleges. It is not enough to focus only on skills for teaching. There are issues

of power and class in which some children have more opportunities to learn at higher levels than other children. The inequities within schools reflect larger societal inequities and inherent barriers, rooted in poverty as well as educational policy and practices that restrict students' success.

Religious, moral and/or ethical beliefs often drive the mission of independent colleges, and independent colleges educate students from racial and ethnic minorities almost the same as at four-year state institutions. The proportion of low- and middle-income students at private colleges and universities is almost the same as at four-year state institutions (National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, 2006). Even the mission of the Association of Independent Liberal Arts Colleges for Teacher Education (AILACTE) is to focus teacher education on the moral dimensions of schooling and education. The Association encourages member institutions to emphasize:

- the importance of individuals,
- the importance of community,
- the obligations that individuals have in community,
- the role that individuals and communities have in a democratic society and
- the principle of equity of access to knowledge.

In support of these principles of equity, this article seeks to do two things: 1) identify issues and challenges we face as we work to redesign programs to successfully prepare beginning educators for a diverse, just and equitable society; and 2) identify key recommendations for reform.

The Challenges

It is not surprising to note that addressing issues of equity poses difficult questions for teacher education. We often lack a transformative approach for candidates to question and understand their own identity and beliefs about race, culture and ethnicity in order to understand their diverse students (Solomon et al., 2005). The structural and contextual elements of schooling are not universally part of teacher education preparation. As teacher educators, we often focus on the needs of individual children or adolescents to the detriment of a focus on structural

issues of schooling that continue the same practices that have historically disenfranchised students (Castro, 2010, p. 207). The notions of meritocracy are strong within our educational environments (Levine-Rasky, 1998). Candidates in our programs often resist the infusion of equity. Defensiveness can easily become the norm when examining their existing beliefs and stereotypes. Working through uncomfortable feelings and experiences often reduces course effectiveness (Pohan and Mathison, 1999). We often experience a lack of self-conscious strategy to integrate equity. Our programs may use an additive approach and faculty are not trained or comfortable addressing issues of equity (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1998). Finally, Anyon (2005) suggests conditions in schools cannot be overcome by school reform alone. There are gaps in opportunities to learn brought on by institution and societal hierarchies and structures. The inequities in education cannot be divorced from societal inequities of poverty, homelessness or joblessness

In a recent *AERA Educational Researcher* piece, Castro (April, 2010, p. 198), citing Zumwalt and Craig and Darling-Hammond and Cobb, wrote, "Preservice teachers generally come from middle-class, Anglo-American backgrounds and prefer to teach in suburban and more affluent school contexts" (. He further cites additional research to suggest existing inequities in terms of access to qualified teachers continue (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Preparing teachers with the necessary dispositions and skills is one of the "most daunting tasks facing teacher educators today" (Castro, 2010, p. 198). Christine Sleeter's research (2008) outlines four issues affecting White preservice teachers:

1. They fail to recognize the omnipresence of racial inequality;
2. They hold deficit views about and lower expectations for students of color;
3. They adopt a "colorblind approach" to teaching;
4. They lack a sense of themselves as cultural beings. (p. 198)

While Castro's article focuses on trends in the perceptions of preservice teachers toward greater acceptance of multicultural education and of teaching diverse groups of students, a concern

regarding our candidates' understandings of multiculturalism as a complex entity remains. A question we teacher educators must ask ourselves is this: How are we preparing teachers for a society that is economically, demographically, technologically and globally different How do our programs reflect the needs of today's schools and children? How do our programs prepare teachers to understand the structural and institutional barriers that defeat reform? How do we teach them to address the inequities that exist in the schools and communities where they will be teaching?

This past March, AACTE called for member institutions to work with their universities, schools, states and the federal government to improve teacher education. While certainly not the first, this call for change comes at a time when teacher preparation is suffering from an onslaught of criticism, giving rise to further "alternative" routes to licensure across the country and to alternative providers. These new ways of thinking about the *how* and *what* of teacher preparation should cause us to clarify our definition of "strong teacher preparation." Art Levine (2006) has suggested that a redesign of teacher education must "produce a greater number of high quality teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to raise student achievement to the highest levels in history"(p. 12). Yet, he says, there are conflicting and competing beliefs regarding the best way to do this. "These differences," he suggests, "undermine successful teacher education reform" (p. 12).

The research on teaching continues to suggest that beginning teachers have limited skills with low expectations for low-income and minority students (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 223). Teacher preparation programs often have tried to address resistance in multiple ways, including the following: 1) selected field placements and other culturally diverse settings linked to deliberate curriculum choices; 2) methods for learning about students' lives and contexts to develop teaching knowledge; 3) integrated study of multicultural concerns and classroom strategies throughout courses, not just located in one course; a commitment to social action; and 4) willingness to struggle with issues of race and class (p. 224). Called "equity pedagogy" (Banks, 2001), these four areas of curricular and experiential focus attempt to enable candidates to demonstrate stronger skills for teaching in diverse school communities.

One of the more interesting findings in Darling-Hammond's study of exemplary teacher education programs (2006) suggests that ongoing reflection is based on recurring questions throughout a program like these: Who determines aims of education? and What principles guide actions? As candidates enter schools that are educating more students who were earlier excluded from school or segregated in school, the required knowledge and skill base has changed. Inclusion policies, shifting demographics and the increasingly tough standards-based reform efforts at the state levels have increased stress on students and teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 257). These foci have placed greater demands on our graduates and on us as teacher educators.

The Flat World lays out a rationale for educating students in a global world—what it will take to create the schools we need. She writes, "The world is changing, and as Tom Friedman has demonstrated, it is increasingly flat" (2010, p. 3). She cites the statistics and facts necessary to understand the troubling parts of our educational system, as currently designed. But more importantly, she compares our lack of investment in education to that of other nations around the world to make it clear that they are transforming their school systems to meet the new demands of a global world. The United States is losing ground, she suggests (p. 9). The result is that we are standing still while other nations are moving past us. For example, in the Program in International Student Assessment (PISA), the U.S. ranks 21 of 30

countries in science and 25 of 30 in mathematics (p. 9). More importantly, she says, the PISA assessments require more advanced analysis and knowledge use than most U.S. tests (p. 10). Besides the weakness in U.S. students' abilities to do complex problem solving, there is the added piece relative to inequality in schools across the country. The U.S. shows the greatest discrepancy between students with different socioeconomic backgrounds in international comparisons (p. 11). On this measure of equity, she writes, the U.S. ranks 45 out of 50 countries (p. 12). The poor standing of the U.S., she writes, is substantially "a product of unequal access for underserved students of color to the kind of intellectually challenging learning measured on international assessments"
(p. 12).

The U.S. also struggles in terms of inequalities of family income. The "wealthiest school districts spend 10 times more than the poorest and spending ratios of 3 to 1 are common within states," she writes (2010, p. 12). In effect, the students with the strongest economic supports receive the greatest resources. She suggests that the back-to-basics approach in math, for example, is the opposite of what countries around the world are doing in their mathematical education. In reading, she says, the U.S. fares a little better in comparison, 18 out of 40 on the PIRLS assessments (Program in International Reading and Literacy Studies) (p. 13). She credits the increased focus on the preparation of teachers to teach reading, as well as higher standards for modest increases in achievement. Yet, she writes that the political nature of funding education, which shifts in policy under new federal administration, creates all kinds of detours and dead ends that continue to leave the poorest schools most vulnerable for qualified teachers and adequate resources (p. 14).

Darling-Hammond cites additional statistics and federal policy to demonstrate that those countries increasing their funding of higher education and their equivalents for K-12 education are surpassing the U.S. in multiple measures. Citing the Organization of Economic Cooperation, she writes "International studies confirm that the U.S. educational system not only lags most other industrialized countries in academic achievement by high school, but that it also allocates more unequal inputs and produces more unequal outcomes than its

peer nations" (2010, p. 16). Later statistics point out that the U.S. is going backwards in educating many of its citizens while most of the rest of the world is moving forward. Many states are failing to invest in the education of low-income children and new immigrants (p. 25). She calls this "squandering capital" (p. 25). What she terms the "opportunity gap" has gotten little attention here in the U.S. She explains the gap as "accumulated differences in access to key educational resources like expert teachers, personalized attention, high quality curriculum opportunities, good educational materials and plentiful information resources" (p. 27). Here is her list of what must be done to provide an equitable education for all children:

- Secure housing, food and health care, so children can come to school ready to learn each day;
- Support early learning environments;
- Equitably fund schools which provide equitable access to high-quality teaching;
- Prepare and support teachers and leaders well;
- Develop standards, curriculum and assessment focused on 21st century learning goals; and
- Reorganize schools for in-depth student and teacher learning. (2010, p. 26)

Multiple research studies suggest the importance of the quality of teachers and expectations for more highly skilled individuals who work effectively with all populations of students. Porter-Magee (2004) found that the lasting effects of a teacher, positive or negative, could be measured for up to four years after the student had left the teacher's classroom. Berry, Hoke and Hirsch (2004) describe teachers as the most "school-related determinant of student achievement." Schools of education have traditionally worked from this premise by focusing on graduating "highly qualified" teachers. As Cochran-Smith (2004) notes, the recent recommendations for education from the No Child Left Behind Act have landed squarely at the feet of teacher preparation institutions.

The achievement of K–12 students has been correlated with the quality of teacher preparation in a way that directly supports the importance of qualified teachers (Brownell et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). A shift in focus from teachers

to teacher education has emerged in response to state and federal mandates—especially the No Child Left Behind Act (Cochran-Smith, 2004). However, this emphasis on improving teacher education predates recent standards-based educational reform. Regulatory agencies, including the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), have focused on performance assessment of teacher candidates (Goubeaud et al, 2004). In 2001, NCATE increased the rigor of standards in content areas for teacher candidates, emphasizing the importance of the knowledge base that candidates possess when exiting teacher education programs (Vaughn & Everhart, 2004). In order to qualify for state licensure, teacher candidates must be prepared by a program accredited by NCATE. To meet NCATE accreditation requirements, schools of education must provide candidates with programs and experiences that adhere to INTASC principles. Working within a policy-driven environment, schools of education have explored a variety of ways to prepare preservice teachers for the classrooms that await them. Unfortunately, recent national studies of coursework by *The National Association of Multicultural Education* (Ensign, 2009) and *Teaching and Teacher Education* (Gorski, 2008) found that a large majority of multicultural courses were taught by unqualified faculty, did not utilize research-based best practices and arbitrarily adhered to policy requirements. Gorski (2008) notes, "Although most of the syllabi reviewed did not appear to be designed to prepare teachers to practice authentic multicultural education, they did appear designed to meet this NCATE standard" (p. 317).

We are responding to accreditation demands, but these demands are driving the curriculum and experiential base rather than essential research-driven practices. Additionally, accreditation does not address how we educate our beginning teachers regarding inequities that currently exist in our systems of schooling.

Recommendations

The challenge of both addressing the development of our candidates to be culturally responsive practitioners and view their own classrooms through a lens of equity AND focusing on inequities that continue to exist within schools and society feels overwhelming. Yet, there are many overlapping recommendations for us teacher educators to use.

What does a transformative program look like? According to the Center for National Origin, Race and Sex Equity (1997), key components of an equity focus in schools include the following:

1. Access to equal courses, facilities and activities, helping English language learners develop needed skills; encouraging students to enter all fields and developing a learning environment that supports all students;
2. Attitudes that change from the inside out and are respectful and intolerant of bias or prejudice;
3. Language that reduces or eliminates bias in vocabulary and usage or conveying ethnocentric attitudes, increasing sensitivity toward appropriate language use;
4. Interactions in communication with students and their families or guardians and examining personal ideologies which might negatively influence how students are treated in class both academically and emotionally;
5. Instruction that selects appropriate topics, assignments and materials;
6. Materials that are current and accurate, with no bias in content, graphics, pictures and language.

The National Academy of Education's *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should Learn and Be Able to Do* (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) suggests several recommendations relative to teacher preparation.

- All teachers need to be equipped to help all students achieve to their greatest potential.

- Preparation to teach must be linked to system reforms. For example, professional learning communities are one key, Darling-Hammond and Bransford write, to changing school cultures. Therefore, teacher education curriculum should help beginning teachers learn to work on the improvement of practice as part of a collaborative community.
- If prospective teachers are to support more equitable and powerful education for their students, then there must be a strong moral purpose that engenders a focus on reform efforts at the school and classroom level.
- Partnerships between schools and districts seeking to transform schools and teaching in tandem are needed. John Goodlad suggested in *Educational Renewal: Better Teachers, Better Schools* (1994) that the symbiotic relationship between schools of education and schools in reform was key to success, that teacher educators must prepare teachers for schools that are reforming themselves to help all learners achieve. The call for change has been with us in teacher education for a long time.

This global picture presents us teacher educators with challenges to educate beginning teachers and school leaders in best practices but also to ensure they know and understand the factors working against K-12 student success. We are not without direction or commitment in liberal arts colleges of teacher education. But without addressing the systems that influence, control and dictate our behaviors individually and collectively in schools, we may have little success in closing achievement gaps and ensuring equal opportunities exist for all children. Some would say this is a moral imperative. Darling-Hammond (2010) concludes her book by saying we must enter a new era in which “the path to our mutual well-being is built on educational opportunity” (p. 328). It is for our common good.

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Leveling the Playing Field: Preparing Teachers for Equitable Instruction in Diverse, Inclusive Classrooms

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Abstract

Despite greater responsibility for creating equitable and inclusive classroom models, some research suggests that educators "may not have the necessary attitudes, dispositions, or perhaps more important, the professional skills to successfully instruct students in diverse, inclusive classrooms" (Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosman & Rouse, 2007, p. 440). This study specifically examines the effects of an interdisciplinary, co-taught curriculum on teacher candidates' beliefs about equitable instruction in their future K-12 classrooms, including the most effective strategies for supporting learners with special needs. This article provides readers with 1) a knowledge of several curricular changes that can be made to a foundations course to better prepare preservice educators for the challenges of differentiating curricula, and, 2) an awareness of the course content and instructional strategies teacher candidates (both general education and special education-endorsed) find most relevant in their practice.

General educators are increasingly challenged to meet the needs of diverse learners, especially those with disabilities (Arthaud, Aram, Breck, Doelling & Bushrow, 2007). As a result, recent changes to federal regulations, captured in the

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), create an impetus for richer and more focused collaborative relationships among special educators and general educators in K-12 schools in order to promote effective instruction for students with special needs and/or students with diverse backgrounds. Despite greater responsibility for creating equitable and inclusive classroom models, some research suggests that educators "may not have the necessary attitudes, dispositions, or perhaps more important, the professional skills to successfully instruct students in diverse, inclusive classrooms" (Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosman & Rouse, 2007, p. 440).

Ladson-Billings (2001) explains that preparing K-12 teachers for "diversity" has become a much more complex, multifaceted endeavor: "Not only [will teachers encounter] . . . multiracial or multiethnic [students] but [these students] are also likely to be diverse along linguistic, religious, ability, and economic lines" (p. 14). Because today's inclusive classrooms represent a commitment to equity in education, teacher education programs are called to examine current practices and responsively adjust their instruction to make the general education-special education partnership more viable and better integrated from the start (Blanton & Pugach, 2007) so that *all* students, regardless of ability, have equal access to effective instruction.

A greater emphasis on co-teaching in teacher education holds potential for fostering this much-needed level of teacher collaboration in mainstream classrooms (Cook & Friend, 1995; Wenzlaff, Berak, Wieseman, Monroe-Baillargeon, Bacharach & Bradfield-Kreider, 2002), yet few studies examine the impact of the co-teaching model in university settings (e.g., Bacharach, Heck & Dahlberg, 2008; Stang & Lyon, 2008). Drawing on surveys of university students in team-taught teacher education courses, Bacharach, Heck & Dahlberg (2008) point to the benefits and drawbacks of co-teaching as an instructional practice. Based on the "overwhelmingly positive nature of the data" gathered (N = 372), Bacharach, Heck & Dahlberg (2008) concluded: "The use of co-teaching in teacher preparation is a promising practice for fostering collaborative skills, increasing student participation, and improving instruction and professional growth for all participants" (p. 9).

Our work builds on these studies by more specifically examining the effects of an interdisciplinary co-taught curriculum on teacher candidates' beliefs about equitable, effective instruction in their future K-12 classrooms, including those strategies that will be most effective in supporting the needs of learners with special needs. As practitioner research, this article features instructional practice in teacher education as two teacher-researchers (representing the fields of educational psychology and special education) have partnered in revising and improving a foundational course in teaching and learning, "Psychology of Learning," in a Master in Teaching Program for future K-12 teachers. As teacher-researchers, we were charged with developing and co-teaching the course so that the principles and practices related to the instruction of diverse learners were integrated throughout the course, as well as aligned with other similar objectives throughout the teacher education program so that graduates of the program have the skills necessary to reach a wide range of learners in their classrooms.

Methodologically, researchers in teacher education point to the limitations of more traditional empirical models of "scientifically-based research" endorsed by the NCLB, suggesting that "experimental designs modeled after medical research . . . cannot answer all the important questions the field faces" (Liston, Whitcomb & Borko, 2007). This critique points to the value of using multiple genres of research (Borko, Liston & Whitcomb, 2007), particularly those that fall under the category of "practitioner research," including action research and self-study, which examine teacher practice "from the inside" and share the features of "intentionality" and "systematicity" (Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006).

Therefore, this article explores 1) the conceptual framework and curricular features necessary to better integrate general education and special education practices for all teacher candidates; and 2) the degree to which the instructional strategies specifically taught might be utilized by teacher candidates in their K-12 internship settings to promote equity in the educational experiences of all types of learners.

An Integrated Foundational Curriculum: The Best of General Education and Special Education Instructional Practices

Our one-year, four-block graduate program provides prospective teachers with an intensive, full-time educational experience that builds on their in-depth undergraduate preparation in an academic major with advanced study in professional education at the graduate level. The Master in Teaching (MIT) program is team-designed and team-delivered. Unlike many teacher education programs, the MIT faculty regularly collaborates in the design of all courses and assignments so that the program curriculum is highly integrated. With a primary focus on social justice, we feature both a "justice & diversity" strand and a "service leadership" strand, which are woven throughout the program rather than serving as single courses that occur once a year. The "Psychology of Learning" course, at the center of our research, also allies itself with our program's focus on social justice by modeling the collaborative practices necessary in equitable, inclusive classrooms and presenting teacher candidates with a conceptual framework for effectively differentiating instruction for diverse learners.

The "Psychology of Learning" (PL) course features many of the foundational skills and practices necessary for effective lesson planning and classroom management in the internship setting and beyond. PL is taught by professors specializing in educational psychology and special education. Carrying the bulk of the instructional time (over 60%) of the first series of courses or blocks of the MIT program, this course focuses on theories and practices of effective learning and teaching for *all* students. Both candidates seeking general education and special education endorsements participate, side by side, in this course. Curricular features of the class include:

- Instructional Approaches: Direct instruction, cooperative learning, constructivist/inquiry-based and metacognitive approaches
- Topics of Emphasis: Multiple intelligences, learning styles, culturally responsive classroom management, motivating reluctant learners and brain-friendly instruction

- Performance-based Assessments: Direct instruction lesson plan, cooperative learning lesson plan, classroom management plans

Course Conceptual Framework

Most teacher education programs focus primarily on preparing teacher candidates to meet the instructional needs of students defined as "typically developing," those students without any type of identified special needs (e.g., English Language Learners) or disabilities. Any coursework related to meeting the needs of students with special needs, if required, is often provided within a separate course that focuses solely on the needs of students with disabilities. As a result, from the beginning of their training, teacher candidates receive the message that students with special needs and those that are "typically developing" are separate groups of students, requiring different approaches to instruction and management. As a result, teachers often report that they feel prepared to teach "typically developing" students—but not the students with disabilities who are included in their classrooms (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

The conceptual model used to guide the planning and instruction of this course is based on principles of differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction emphasizes that one approach or style of teaching will not meet the needs of most students. In this model teacher candidates learn that *all* students have both learning strengths and challenges, which teachers must be prepared to address in their lesson planning and instructional presentation (Giangreco, 2007; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; Van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). This has become increasingly important because of the growing diversity of students found in today's classrooms, which results in a wide continuum of student background, ability and needs to be addressed by the teacher. As a result, teacher candidates must learn—from the beginning of their coursework—how to effectively plan and implement equitable instruction that meets the needs of as many learners as possible, as well as how to make adjustments to instruction, assignments and assessments that

differentiate for those learners who still need extra scaffolding and support.

Within this conceptual model, the broad goals for the "Psychology of Learning" course include: 1) expanding the definition of successful learning so that *more* students experience success rather than failure; 2) increasing teacher candidates' repertoire of instructional strategies and tools to meet the needs of as many students as possible in order to promote equity in the learning experience; and 3) heightening awareness of how society and schools have developed systems that perpetuate failure and overemphasize disability (Hehir, 2007).

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the way in which we conceptualize instructional approaches in an inclusive classroom. Each class represents a mix of "typically developing" students and students with disabilities, or other special needs. Rather than presenting these as separate groups with different needs, we present them as one group of learners whose strengths and needs often overlap. The key for teacher candidates is mastering a full range of instructional approaches so that they can responsively shift from one to the next, according to the learning target's level of difficulty and/or the abilities of students to grasp the skill or material.

In the example used in Figure 1, explicit or direct instruction is frequently the primary focus of training in meeting the needs of students with disabilities, as a great deal of research supports its efficacy for that population (Lewis & Doorlag, 2005) while constructivist or inquiry-based approaches to instruction are frequently utilized in classrooms for "typically developing" students. In reality, both approaches to instruction, which fall on a continuum, can be effective and meaningful to *all* learners depending on how and when they are utilized (Joyce & Weil, 2009). Therefore, our students learn to implement both approaches to instruction, as well as recognize the strengths and limitations of each so that they can utilize the instructional approach that is best matched to the lesson content and needs of the students. We then discuss ways teachers can adapt and scaffold the lesson to support those learners that may need more individualized supports in this context, regardless of whether the student has an identified special need.

In addition to training in varied instructional approaches, teacher candidates receive extensive instruction related to brain-

friendly instruction, multiple intelligences and diverse learning styles so that they can tap students' varied abilities and learning preferences throughout their lesson planning and implementation. Teachers tend to approach instruction in ways that match their own learning preferences, which limits the range of students who will respond to that approach to instruction. Through various instructional activities and discussions, we urge teacher candidates to push themselves to teach in ways that may feel initially unfamiliar and unnatural to them personally, but that meet the needs of many of their students. For example, if a teacher tends to be detailed, analytical and introverted in her approach to instruction, we urge her to also design learning activities to meet the needs of the students in her class who may be more random, abstract and global thinkers as well, increasing the range of learners who will be responsive to her instruction.

In this way teacher candidates initially learn how to plan units and lessons that connect with the widest range of learners possible. They also learn how foundational principles of effective instruction can be meaningful to *all* learners, including those from diverse backgrounds and those with established disabilities or other special needs. This foundational course is followed by a one-quarter elementary or secondary methods course that builds on these strategies while providing students with more in-depth training and experience in utilizing effective instructional strategies prior to the beginning of the student teaching internship.

Methods

In order to examine the impact of our curriculum on teacher candidates' beliefs about effective, equitable instruction, we created two nearly identical surveys, which were collected at two data points (post-PL course and post-internship). The post-PL course survey asked teacher candidates to predict the instructional strategies they would regularly use with "typically developing" students and students with special needs. Whereas, the post-internship survey asked candidates to report the strategies they *actually* used most frequently and effectively to meet the needs of all students (e.g., "typically developing" and students with special needs). In addition to quantitative survey

results, we solicited qualitative comments from the surveys themselves and our course evaluations. Then, we identified those comments that specifically addressed the value of differentiated instruction.

Results: How Teacher Candidates Utilize Course Content for Planning and Instruction

When surveyed upon completion of the student teaching internship, a majority of Spring 2008 teacher candidates (n = 30) rated both the overall course content (77% of respondents) and the interdisciplinary co-teaching format of the course (70% of respondents) as "very important" to their learning and their ability to apply course content in their field settings. Furthermore, this post-internship pilot data (Spring 2008) also identified three aspects of the course as the most influential on planning and instruction for meeting the needs of diverse learners and those with disabilities. These included: 1) the elements of lesson design (Hunter, 1991; Joyce & Weil, 2009*)*; 2) Gardner's (1983) multiple intelligences theory; and 3) various learning style theories (e.g., Dunn, Dunn, & Price, 1989; Gregorc, 1982; Myers & McCaulley, 1985; Sternberg, 1988; Witkin, Moore, Goodenough & Cox, 1977).

As we continued to collect surveys in 2009, two more cohorts (post-course) predicted which instructional strategies would be most effective in meeting the needs of all students. Table 1 displays candidates' post-course predictions in white while post-internship data from the Spring '08 cohort (in grey) provides an interesting contrast in terms of the instructional strategies *actually used* most frequently in K-12 classrooms. Furthermore, teacher candidates identified frequent strategy use for the general K-12 population (plain text) versus K-12 students with special needs (bold text) within Table 1.

Interestingly, when compared with post-internship data, post-course candidates' predictions generally held strong relative to two instructional strategies: 1) explicit/direction instruction (Hunter, 1991; Joyce & Weil, 2009), which features the seven elements of lesson design (e.g., set, input, modeling, check for understanding, guided practice, independent practice and closure); and 2) think-aloud instruction, which foregrounds

detailed, extemporaneous verbal modeling of a particular skill by teachers and/or their students (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989; Eva-Wood, 2008). However, post-course candidates predicted more frequent use of constructivist approaches to learning such as use of the Storypath curriculum (McGuire, 1997) and other inquiry-based approaches, yet post-internship candidates reported that they did not actually use these approaches as regularly with K-12 general education students. Cooperative learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Johnson Holubec, 1994), however, appeared more frequently useful to post-internship candidates than was predicted in the post-course surveys.

At a qualitative level, teacher candidates' comments indicate that the course provided valuable, well-integrated content for effectively meeting the needs of a wide range of learners. The following are some quotes, which were captured immediately following the Spring '08 class: "[This course] was very enriching and emotional! I was amazed at how much this course ultimately changed my belief systems and challenged the core of who I am." A second candidate claimed, "This course discerned my desire to teach all students equally and with compassion."

Open-ended survey comments collected after the Spring '08 cohort completed their internships provide insight into more specific content and strategies that were useful to them at an applied level. Teacher candidates responded to the following question: "Reflecting on the 'Psychology of Learning' course, please tell us about any aspect that has proven particularly important or powerful for you as prepare for your first year of teaching":

- The most important element is to ensure that each lesson incorporates 3-4 strategies to accommodate students. . . . I find when I met the learning styles, it allowed the class and my teaching to be culturally responsive, and behavioral issues were minimized.
- You two gave us so much foundational knowledge that will guide me through me first years as a teacher. Specifically . . . classroom management, learning styles/multiple intelligences, lesson design, brain development, accommodating for students with special needs, collaborating with colleagues and intervention techniques.

- Think-alouds are a wonderful model for learning, especially for students at lower skill levels with language, literacy and critical thinking.

Discussion

Based on both the sampling of qualitative comments and the survey data collected to date, teacher candidates claim that the elements of lesson design (Hunter, 1991; Joyce & Weil, 2009), Gardner's (1983) multiple intelligence theory and various learning style theories (e.g., Dunn et al., 1989; Gregorc, 1982; Myers & McCaulley, 1985; Sternberg, 1988; Witkin et al., 1977) are particularly helpful to them in planning for equitable, differentiated instruction. Additionally, two instructional strategies (see Table 1) seem to be most influential on teacher candidates as they consider teaching students in inclusive classrooms: cooperative learning and think-aloud instruction.

Interestingly, however, Spring 2008 interns reported use of direct/explicit instruction and constructivist approaches contradicted traditionally accepted ideas about the appropriate instructional methods for students with special needs. Interns reportedly used direct instruction more readily with "typically developing" students (70.0%) than students with special needs (56.7%). In turn, interns claimed to utilize constructivist approaches more frequently with special needs students (31.0%) than with "typically developing" students (13.0%). These percentages support the idea that our conceptual framework (see Figure 1) is more representative of the fluidity of instruction necessary to meet the needs of all students. A false dichotomy occurs when we attempt to box "typically developing" students and students with special needs into two distinctive categories representing differing instructional needs.

Limitations

The possible differences between post-course predictions of instructional strategy use, noted above, and post-internship reports of actual strategy use may be attributed to a number of factors. First, self-report data only indicates teacher candidates'

beliefs about their instructional strategy use. Second, interns' reports of actual strategy use may not represent the realities of their day-to-day performance because their conceptions of "cooperative learning" or "think-aloud instruction," for example, may be very different from those we presented to them in the first quarter of the program. Third, cooperating teachers' instructional repertoires and philosophies may have affected interns' strategy choices as they negotiated lesson plans with their mentor teachers. Finally, district-level curricula and state-level performance assessments for interns bring their own biases in dictating the range of strategies interns need to demonstrate for certification.

With these limitations in mind, the data collected still holds value, particularly in addressing how candidates' beliefs and perceptions regarding effective instruction may evolve over time. Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory clearly associates growing self-efficacy with experience while Hoy (2000) asserts that the most "powerful influences on the development of teacher efficacy are mastery experiences during student teaching or the induction year" (p. 2). Therefore, the participants' expressed beliefs about effective instruction, in this case, may be predictive and/or influential on their "personal self-efficacy" (confidence in their teaching ability) and instructional repertoires as full-time teachers.

Implications for Further Study

First, because the survey data collected to date does not yet allow for within-cohort comparisons, our forthcoming research will address shifts in candidates' perceptions (by cohort) from post-course to post-internship. Regardless, current percentages may be indicative of the next cycle of survey data we will collect. Second, to supplement self-report data, internship supervisors will track instructional strategy use at five observational data points per intern. Finally, plans for following cohorts beyond their internship experiences and into their first year of teaching—with survey-based data and further supervisor observations—will enhance our understanding of the most common methods teachers use to differentiate instruction and teach all students effectively.

Conclusion

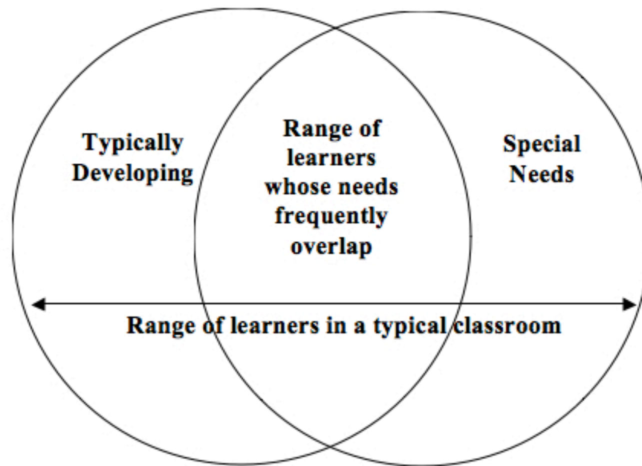
This study contributes to the emerging research base on integrated teacher education programs and how they can better prepare future educators for equitable, inclusive classrooms. Furthermore, the design of the project could provide a template for other programs engaged in self-study, formative evaluation and subsequent program revision. We hope that our work informs others in our field with: 1) a better understanding of the ways in which an integrative co-taught curriculum in teacher education can provide a powerful, collaborative model for future K-12 teachers; 2) knowledge of several curricular changes that can be made to a foundations course to better prepare preservice educators for the challenges of differentiating curricula; and 3) an awareness of the content and strategies teacher candidates (both general education and special education endorsed) find most applicable and relevant in their practicum settings. Ultimately, we hope that our current and future findings will point to the most effective instructional methods for meeting the needs of diverse learners within the increasingly complex K-12 classroom environment.

Table 1: Instructional Strategies: Percentage of Candidates who Claim "Frequent" Use

Cohort	**Explicit/ Direct Instruc-tion**	**Construc-tivist Learning**	**Cooperative Learning**	**Think Aloud Instruc-tion**
Spring 09 (Post Course) N=33	72.7 **72.7**	37.5 **45.5**	45.5 **54.5**	78.8 **84.8**
Fall 09 (Post Course) N=34	61.8 **73.5**	32.4 **29.4**	52.9 **50.0**	76.5 **82.4**
Spring 08 (Post Intern-ship) N=30	70.0 **56.7**	13.3 **31.0**	76.7 **63.3**	80.0 **60.0**

General K-12 Population (plain text)
Special Needs K-12 Population (BOLD)

Figure 1. Conceptual Model for Integration of General Education and Special Education Content in a Preservice Teacher Training Program



Goal: Teacher Candidates become fluent in both approaches to instruction and know how to differentiate for all learners from across the continuum.

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Pursuing Racial Equity in Our Schools: Lessons Learned from African American Male Teachers in a Suburban School District

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Abstract

In a "Multicultural Teaching and Learning" course, racial equity is one of the many issues explored. When discussing racial equity in our schools, teacher education students in the course focus their attention on such issues as the achievement gap, referrals to special education of African American and Latino males, the racism of low expectations. When faced with these issues, the mostly White student population is often times silent, color-blind, or oblivious to the racialized dynamics of schooling. In an effort to expand student understanding of racial equity, but also explore the complexity of race in schools, seven African American male teachers in a suburban school district were interviewed. As a result of these interviews, it is apparent that racial equity conversations must also assist teacher education students in understanding the relationships between African American and White teachers.

Introduction

During my "Multicultural Teaching and Learning" course, my students and I engage in conversations that explore numerous issues related to educational equity. In an effort to facilitate these conversations, I focus our discussions around the work of

Gay (2003), Lee, Menkart & Okazawa-Rey (2002), Nieto (1999), Banks (2006), Ladson-Billings (2006), Grant & Sleeter (2007) & Landsman (2001). While their work provides my students with numerous perspectives through which to consider a variety of educational equity issues, the most challenging discussions to have are related to racial equity in schools. When pressed to initially identify relevant issues associated with racial equity, my students are either silent, say that they don't see race or argue that we are "post-racial" and racism isn't an issue anymore. It could be argued that these conversations are challenging because, as is the case in my situation, the majority of teacher education students are White (AACTE, 2010) and have been "conditioned not to think about race and, especially, not to talk about it" (Marx, 2006, p. 21), or don't view race as an important factor in schooling (Milner, 2005). Additionally, many White preservice teachers adopt a colorblind mentality. As such, White preservice teachers who adopt this mentality are more prone to participate in race-related conversations with hostility and believe that many solutions to racial inequity in schools are illogical and undemocratic (Choi, 2008; Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

In an effort to move beyond the previously mentioned challenges, I have focused racial equity discussions on numerous issues including, but not limited to, the achievement gap, referrals to special education of African American and Latino males, and Landsman's (2004) notion of "the racism of low expectations." Over time, I have noted how many of my students state that their preferred teaching environment is situated in suburban communities. Considering the racial demographics in suburban schools, whereby the number of African American students have increased significantly (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009), this view creates an interesting juxtaposition to their silence about racial equity in schools. As a result of changes in the student population, school districts have begun to focus on recruiting more African American teachers. As such, school districts that are successful not only introduce their largely White teaching population—85% in suburban schools (AACTE, 2010)—to students that sit outside of their cultural frame of reference, but also teachers similarly positioned.

My recent study of seven African American male teachers in a suburban school district, focused on their efforts to improve the academic achievement of African Americans. The seven

teachers from a suburban school district provided me with an additional framework to consider discussions of racial equity. Their experiences were in part framed by the increase in the number of African American students attending this suburban school district, and the school district's ensuing efforts to hire more African American teachers, particularly African American male teachers. I sought not only to understand the experiences of these teachers, but also to utilize their experiences to inform my discussions related to racial equity in my "Multicultural Teaching and Learning" course.

Making Myself Vulnerable

My reality in the world is that I am an African American male teacher educator, husband and father. This reality has placed me in a position whereby racial equity conversations in a course on multicultural teaching and learning make me vulnerable—vulnerable to being offended and vulnerable to becoming angry. While I've taught this course, or one similar in content, going back to my years as a doctoral student, I've never quite overcome my nervousness when it comes time to deal with issues of race. It has always been the case that I'm in the numeric minority, and often times the only African American or person of color in the room. As such, I have taken extra precautions to ensure that I enter these conversations with respect, a sense of curiosity and an awareness of my own dealings with racism during my life. It is through this self-reflective approach that I have come to the conclusion that I should only introduce racial equity issues after dealing with socioeconomic and gender equity in schools. Admittedly, this is rather challenging to maneuver around and through because I often times think that my students see issues of socioeconomic and gender equity as more salient than race.

Perhaps my biggest challenge in dealing with racial equity in a classroom with mostly White students is more than determining what content to include, or when to introduce it. In fact, my biggest challenge on some days is managing my emotions when a White student makes a comment that I perceive to be racist or rather ignorant. Be it their disbelief in racial profiling by the police, or their belief that race plays no role in the educational

experience of African American children, my emotions are wrapped up into racial equity discussions because I have been forced to deal with race, and all its trappings, throughout my life.

African American Teachers in Suburban Schools

The Pew Hispanic Center (2009) has reported that the number of African American children enrolling in suburban schools has increased over the last five years. As this change has taken place, many school districts have made efforts to recruit more African American teachers (Lewis, 2006). African American teachers only make up 7% of the teaching population (Snyder, 2010), with the majority working in urban schools (Hancock, 2006; Lynn, 2006; King, 1993). While this number pales in comparison to the number of African American students who attend schools in the United States, 17% (Snyder, 2010), the number of African American male teachers is even lower. Comprising a mere 1% of the national teaching force (Lewis, 2006), the recruitment of African American men into teaching has been a prominent feature of numerous collaborations between colleges and universities, school districts and state departments of education (Brown & Butty, 1999; Lewis, 2006; Zeichner, 2003). As White teachers make-up 85% of suburban teachers, and their African American colleagues are just 6.3% (AACTE, 2010), perspectives related to race are bound to be different (Milner, 2005), but also “disagreements over the treatment of specific students, over questions of respect, or over cultural differences in communication styles” (Lewis, 2004, 53).

Study Methodology

The city in which the school district is located is approximately 40 minutes from a large, urban enclave with 85% of the 900,000 residents being African American. Due to the current economic conditions in the urban center, a rise in crime and a failing educational system, African American parents are relocating to the surrounding suburban communities. Of the approximately 16,000 students in the district, 14.5% are African

American, while only 5% of the teaching force is African American.

The seven teachers in the study participated in face-to-face interviews that lasted no longer than 90 minutes (see Figure 1). Data for this study was analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith, 1996) due to the need to explore how they make meaning from their experiences in schools by focusing on their thoughts and perceptions.

Figure 1. Study Participants

Name	Age	Subject/ Grade	Years of Experience	African American students in school	Other African American teachers in building
Mr. Jones	28	9th grade physics	8	23%	1
Mr. Wright	35	4th grade	10	20%	0
Mr. Johnson	45	10th grade history	10	12%	0
Mr. Smith	23	8th grade math	2	30%	1
Mr. Ray	22	2nd grade	1	8%	0
Mr. Mason	50	12th grade Eng.	15	10%	0
Mr. Davis	30	7th grade science	7	4%	0

The goal of this data analysis was to explore the processes through which participants make meaning from their lived experiences. IPA focuses on the uniqueness of thoughts and perceptions of individuals. Gathering meaning from one's experiences is usually done by processing and self-reflection (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

Once text was transcribed, I reviewed participant responses several times. Instead of looking only for frequency in themes, the primary researcher looked for underlying meaning in participants' responses. The text was further reviewed for contrasts and comparisons in the wording. A comprehensive list of master themes was generated from this process, and the themes identified from this portion of the data analysis were discussed with an independent auditor at several points. The auditor made suggestions for revision of some of the themes.

Findings

Based on an analysis of data, the researcher found two primary themes: (1) African American teachers' role as advocates and mentors for African American students, and (2) conflict in cultural perspectives impacting relationships with White teachers. Each of these themes will be illustrated using direct quotes and descriptions from the interview transcripts.

Theme One: Role as advocates and mentors for African American students

Mentoring the African American students emerged as a primary theme in the teachers' experiences at their respective schools. All seven participants mentioned various goals that they had for their students, but they were keenly aware of their role as "more than academic." One teacher, Mr. Smith, indicates that it's about more than academics and good grades—he wants to empower the students to deal with the day-to-day challenges of being African American in a place where they will be the numeric minority.

> I know they face challenges being isolated in some of these classes. I want my Black students to come to a place every day where they want to be here and they want to learn. (Mr. Smith)

Another teacher says,

> I know that I have a lot on my plate, but I also know that I have a responsibility to do more than educate the kids but also prepare them for life . . . especially in this school system where they will always be the minority. (Mr. Johnson)

Mr. Davis believes that the mentoring is needed because "so many of the African American kids aren't from this community and they have a hard time adjusting."

Going deeper, Mr. Mason has determined that mentoring is not about a professional decision but also about choosing a lifestyle that you decide to live. He believes that when one becomes a teacher, parents and the community trust that you will work on behalf of their children.

> Man I've been doing this for 15 years and one thing that I do know is these Black kids need us. Not just in school, but outside of school. They [families and students] will ask you for help with all sorts of stuff. Some of it has nothing to do with school. (Mr. Mason)

Because African American students occupy a small minority, one participant has taken formal steps to develop a mentoring program in collaboration with the community. The *Lunch Buddy Program* run by Mr. Johnson is an attempt to provide direct support for the African American students. By having African American mentors come into the school during the lunch hour, the students connect to another caring adult. Of particular importance is the role of the African American male mentors working with the African American male students to help them transition from urban to suburban schooling.

> The *Lunch Buddy Program* was good for them because I worked hard to recruit other African Americans, but a focus on men, who grew up in the city and had to navigate a similar circumstance. (Mr. Johnson)

Aside from providing personal and academic support for the African American students, three of the participants revealed that their primary focus when mentoring the students was to look long-term. When focusing on college preparation, one teacher, Mr. Jones, believes that “many of the kids [African American] have never thought about college.”

> I had one kid who had a 3.5 but had no clue about college. I brought in some university folks to talk to this dude. I mean he’s super bright. Hell, I can’t do this by myself, we need the Black folks in the community. (Mr. Jones)

The role of mentoring African American students is a tremendous task considering the other duties that each participant must fulfill. However, these teachers have also taken on the challenge of raising issues with the school community about how the African American students are treated. Be it Mr. Wright pushing for one of his African American boys to get into the gifted and talented class, Mr. Smith raising questions about the rate at which African American males are suspended or Mr. Jones openly questioning the failure to place African American students in honors science courses, all of the teachers have taken on the system.

Theme Two: Difference in cultural perspectives impacting relationships with White teachers

The teachers’ presence in the schools was questioned from the outset. Many White staff postulated that the only reason the teachers got their jobs was because they were African American. This perspective often created a hostile work environment for the participants in this study who had been teaching in the district for 10 years or less. Mr. Smith acknowledges that the district came to his university and recruited him to increase the number of African American teachers. However, being recruited doesn’t mean that he didn’t work as hard as any White teacher who got hired or passed over.

> I had to work just as hard in school as White teachers. I took the same test that they took and passed them. In fact, I graduated with a 3.7 GPA. (Mr. Smith)

Mr. Ray experienced more than hostility in his school. When he was told that a White colleague resented him because he "was occupying a job that her friend [White female] applied for," he said he knew that he was going to have to deal with that hanging over his head for quite some time.

> Ever since then, she's always trying to talk down to me or act like I don't know what I'm doing. (Mr. Ray)

All of the participants in this study teach in schools with minimal African American students. They are similarly positioned in that the numbers of African American teachers are also minimal or limited to themselves (see Figure 1). Two participants were able to find solace in not being the only African American teachers. However, not being the sole African American teacher in the school made conversations with their African American colleagues stressful. When Mr. Smith and another African American teacher would talk in the hallway on numerous occasions, White colleague would make comments like "what are you two plotting," or "oh no, there goes trouble." Mr. Smith was not alone in being frustrated with the assumptions made within comments like these.

> It's hard to deal with when you feel like you're being questioned and your race might be the motive. Some days I feel like I'm on edge, or maybe I'm extra sensitive. (Mr. Johnson)

Despite the previously mentioned assumptions, and several White staff members questioning their (Mr. Wright and Mr. Davis) communication styles with African American students, many of their White colleagues sought out assistance with some African American children. As all seven of the participants in this study agreed to provide assistance, three of the seven have stopped doing it because of what they called "cultural miscommunication," and an overwhelming sense of fatigue.

> I'm still working for and with the Black students. But after 15 years, I feel tired. Tired of justifying my approach. Tired of having to defend my very existence as a Black man. It's almost like they [White teachers] don't understand Black people. So they damn sure ain't going to understand Black students. I don't know, it's a struggle. (Mr. Mason)

Mr. Mason's fatigue and frustration was reflected in some manner by all of the participants. Mr. Smith and Mr. Ray expressed their fatigue in this way:

> It's tough to be here some days. Not because of the kids but because I feel like some of the White teachers don't get Black people. It gets old feeling like I have to justify my very existence. But hey, like the Negro spiritual says, "we shall not be moved." (Mr. Ray)

> That gets so old. And when I do tell them, they look at me like I'm crazy or want to question what I'm saying. I'm tired of that mess. I'm not sure how long this is going to work for me. (Mr. Smith)

Discussion

The African American male teachers in this study revealed a rather complex set of circumstances they are required to navigate during their daily interactions with White staff and African American students. Their mentoring and advocacy revolved around similar characteristics that have been attributed to African American teachers who taught in segregated schools prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954): counselors, benefactors, encouragers and race cheerleaders (Walker and Tompkins, 2004). The notion of "race cheerleaders" is explicated in their efforts to assist African American students in their understanding of how racism in a school system that is largely White manifests itself. Furthermore, the teachers took on the roles of "encourager," "counselor" and "benefactor" by helping their African American students to see past understanding the system, to develop skills for navigating race-related issues during their

schooling experience. Their stance as "race cheerleaders" is very much rooted in Critical Race Theory (CRT), whereby race is acknowledged as a significant factor in American society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and a permanent structure within the American social, political and economic landscape (Lynn, 2002). By using CRT to better understand the perspectives of the participants in this study, it is clear that their efforts to "name and discuss the pervasive daily reality of racism" (Stovall, 2005, p. 199) with the students is about education but also about real life.

As their orientation toward working with African American youth is similar to the actions of African American teachers from the pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) era of segregated schooling, conflicts subsequently resulted with some of their White colleagues. The conflicts that seemed to impact the participants the most were related to "cultural miscommunication," public criticism of their pedagogy and criticism of their efforts to support African American students. These micropolitical conflicts arise in schools when teachers have views and behaviors that are different (Achinstein, 2002). As a result of their efforts to endure the conflicts, and still advocate for and mentor African American students, the teachers in this study revealed that they had grown weary. This weariness is not only a product of the conflicts, but of battles that are rooted in race—racial battle fatigue.

Racial battle fatigue helps us understand "the physiological and psychological strain exacted on racially marginalized groups and the amount of energy lost dedicated to coping with racial microaggressions and racism" (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007, p. 555). When applied to the teachers in this study, their racial battle fatigue is a result of the racial microaggressions associated with the comments and behaviors of some White colleagues. As noted by Sue et al., (2008) racial microaggressions assail their lived experiences as African Americans whereby "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities" (p. 72) can be psychologically damaging or force African Americans into a self-imposed mental and physical exile.

Conclusion

It is clear from the outcomes of the interviews with the African American teachers in this study that racial equity discussions must include school-based dialogue that explores the relationship between White and African American teachers. To further dialogue about this in my course, our discussions have been grounded by *Culturally Relevant Schools: Implications for Workplace Relationships* (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). As this book explores the dynamics of race in the lives of teachers in suburban schools, my students discuss in small groups and also listen to a panel of African American teachers from a local suburban school district. While the panel is the most common form of engagement with this issue, I've utilized a fishbowl exercise as well. The result of focusing on this issue is reflected in students' comments when the students observe this occurring in schools in which they are student teaching or interning. This is a critical moment of learning for my students.

Yet, there are still those White students that I never reach. That group sits with their arms folded and remains silent. Perhaps my insistence on dealing with the role of White privilege in our understanding of those who are considered the cultural other limits my success. Perhaps it's resistance to dealing with the issues when an African American male professor facilitates conversations. It's these ongoing questions that fuel my passion for not only pushing my students' understanding of racial equity, but also giving them new perspectives to consider the realities associated with being a teacher in an ever changing schooling environment.

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Teaching for Equity: A Transformationist Approach

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Abstract

Today's teachers must be equipped to reach all children and embrace a pedagogy of equity. Toward that end, teacher preparation programs need to foster a transformationist pedagogy which allows students to develop into culturally responsive teachers. This paper describes three components of a teacher preparation program that embraces teaching for equity as part of its central mission. These program components include the program mission, course experiences and continuous assessment. These components are part of a systematic, multi-faceted, integrated approach that allows teacher candidates to transform themselves and see the world in new ways.

"I see it so differently now. Before I took this course, I never stopped to think about children who are different from me." This statement, articulated by a preservice teacher, represents the realization that cultural competence is critical when teaching in diverse classrooms. True teaching for equity in the 21st century demands multicultural awareness and cultural competence on the part of teachers. However, preservice teachers often come into our profession lacking the dispositions necessary to be effective in diverse classrooms. As teacher educators we are charged with the important task of cultivating a sense of competence within candidates to effectively deal with diverse students in the classroom. These sentiments are captured by a former student who once said, "I can never see the world the same way again," a

comment that earmarks a sense of transformation in thinking about race and ethnicity.

In essence, today's teachers must be equipped to reach all children and embrace a pedagogy of equity, pedagogy that ensures the success of all learners, particularly those of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Classroom demographics show that minority students will soon become the majority. Villegas and Lucas (2007) report that from 1972 to 2003, according to NCES data, the percentage of racial/ ethnic students in American public schools nearly doubled from 22% to 41%. Banks (2007, p. vii) cites recent census data pointing out that in 2000 people of color made up 20% of the population in the United States; furthermore, census estimates put the percentage of people of color at 38% by 2025 and at 50% by the year 2050. Although current demographics indicate ever increasing diversity in American classrooms, the racial and ethnic demographics of the teaching population remain stubbornly homogenous, reflecting a population of White, middle-income females (G. R. Howard, 2006; T. C. Howard, 2010).

Geneva Gay (2000) calls for culturally responsive teaching, a way of teaching that teaches for equity across racial and ethnic lines. Specifically, Gay defines culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them" (p. 29). Culturally responsive teaching depends on the development of "cultural critical consciousness" as part of teachers' processes of self-reflection. According to Gay and Kirkland (2003), self-reflection and cultural critical consciousness "involve thoroughly analyzing and carefully monitoring both personal beliefs and instructional behaviors about the value of cultural diversity, and the best ways to teach ethnically different students for maximum positive effects" (p. 182). Critical self-examination is central to the development of cultural critical consciousness. Teachers from mainstream culture need to step outside their own experiences to begin to understand the perspective of a person of color. Gay attests that to be successful in teaching racially diverse students, "Educators also need to analyze their own cultural attitudes, assumptions, mechanisms, rules, regulations that have made it difficult for

them to teach these children successfully" (2000, p. 26). This process of questioning one's own cultural values is essential if White teachers are going to be successful in teaching students of color. Teacher education programs situated in liberal arts environments are particularly well-suited to provide venues for this critical self-reflection and analysis. Gary Howard (2006) posits that the "inner work of personal transformation has been the missing piece in the preparation of White teachers" (p. 6). Howard recognizes the need for "transformationist pedagogy," a view of teaching that means " . . . teaching and leading in such a way that more of our students, across more of their differences, achieve at a higher level, more of the time, without giving up who they are" (p. 133). Howard's paradigm provides the conceptual grounding for the teacher education program described here. This program creates a safe venue for allowing teacher candidates to do this inner work and enables them to see their world with new eyes.

This teacher education program embraces teaching for equity as part of its central mission. While equity is construed to also include gender and students with special needs, for the purpose of this paper, our focus is on racial and ethnic diversity. Specifically, this paper describes three program components which influence teacher education candidates to teach for equity. These program components include: the program mission, course experiences and continuous assessment. While the program addresses the needs of several areas of teacher certification, the focus here is on candidates seeking certification to teach in elementary schools.

Program Mission

The education program highlighted here is a teacher preparation program at Transylvania University, a liberal arts university situated in Lexington, Kentucky. The overall university student population is approximately 1100 students. Within the education program, currently 35 students have been admitted and are pursuing teacher certification across a variety of areas including: secondary teaching in mathematics, history and English; middle grades teaching; P-12 teaching in music, physical education and art; and elementary education. This

teacher preparation program has earned both state and NCATE accreditation. The student population reflects national demographic trends of the teaching profession; most of the students are White and come from middle class backgrounds. Often these students have not had occasion to question what it means to be a member of the dominant culture.

A key program objective which is guided by both the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) and the Kentucky Teacher Standards (Kentucky Educational Professional Standards Board, 2010) states that the education candidate will "have knowledge of individual differences in development and diversity (cultural, physical, social, ethnic or cognitive) that is needed to plan and implement effective and inclusive instruction, ensuring care and attention to every learner" (Hurley, 2007). Toward that end, the program faculty members have a strong commitment to diversity as expressed by a faculty belief statement: "We believe that future teachers need to be careful observers of children and adolescents so that they can design and plan instruction in order to create appropriate learning climates for the diverse learning styles of their future students" (Hurley, 2007). The program mission is also guided by the NCATE standard for diversity which states that teacher candidates should "acquire and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn" (NCATE, 2010). Teaching for equity is a compelling component of the program mission which is articulated by its conceptual framework and grounds virtually all facets of the program, including course experiences and program assessment.

Course Experiences

Several courses attend to issues of race and ethnicity. Of central importance is the fact that issues of diversity and equity are infused through virtually every course in the curriculum. Key course experiences are highlighted here to demonstrate innovative teaching practices that work to influence our candidates to embrace equity in their teaching.

Foundation Courses

"Observing the Learner," a course on psychological foundations, is the first course taken by students and often represents the first time they confront issues of race and ethnicity. While the course provides the foundation for learning and instructional theory, a key component of the course is devoted to issues of race and ethnicity. Students analyze readings such as Herbert Kohl's (1991) "I Won't Learn from You" and excerpts from Lisa Delpit's *Other People's Children* (2006) as they start to examine assumptions about how White dominance plays itself out in most classrooms. Students are often struck by Delpit's discussion of "the culture of power" (Delpit, 2006, p. 24) and start to examine how power is enacted in classrooms as they reflect on field observations in diverse school settings and analyze case studies featuring the experiences of children of color in classrooms. Another eye-opening experience within this course is the viewing of "Skin Deep," a documentary produced by Frances Reid (1995) where college students of varying ethnic backgrounds confront deeply held notions of race and ethnicity. The film is often greeted with silence, demonstrating the difficulty students have in questioning assumptions about race and ethnicity. In discussing the film, students slowly begin to unpack their own notions about race, ethnicity and power. Often students resist the fact that teachers should be conscious of cultural differences, insisting that good teaching involves being "colorblind" and that "all students should be treated the same." Colorblindness and the "washing out" of diversity is a popular theme often embraced by candidates early in their program tenure (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Howard, 2006).

"Constructivist Pedagogy" is a course that typically follows the psychological foundations course. The overall paradigm for this course is constructivist-based teaching where students begin to understand a kind of pedagogy that empowers learners. Students begin to embrace constructivist pedagogy and think of the teaching role as one of empowerment. A feature of this course is exposure to Geneva Gay's text, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*. This text stimulates reflection about the principles of culturally responsive teaching and how it is personified in the classroom (Gay, 2000). Students are also challenged by Gay's notion of culturally responsive caring, which goes far beyond

just being "nice and friendly" to your students. Gay describes culturally responsive caring as "one of the major pillars of culturally responsive pedagogy for ethnically diverse students" and notes that it is "manifested in the form of teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about students' human value, intellectual capability, and performance responsibilities. Teachers demonstrate caring for children as *students* and as *people*" (p. 45). Additionally, students who take this course also explore the topic of culturally responsive classroom management and reflect upon how teachers' biases and stereotypes can influence their approaches toward behavioral expectations of culturally diverse students. The students also conduct field experiences in this course and write reflections about how they see culturally responsive teaching and classroom management being implemented (or not implemented) in their field placement**.**

The social foundations course, "Schooling in American Culture," is another core course. In this course students are exposed to the writings of John Dewey (1998), Nel Noddings (2006) and Joel Spring (2010). Students examine the culture of schools along with the history of schooling from the perspectives of underrepresented populations. In this course students are also asked to examine the concept of white privilege through reading and analyzing a critical article by Peggy McIntosh, "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (McIntosh, 1990). Another notable activity of this foundations course is the students' completion of a personal cultural assessment. As part of this assessment each student identifies artifacts of personal significance and analyzes each artifact in terms of culture, issues of power and how the artifact reflects the student's values. This powerful exercise reveals students' own discovery of white privilege and how they have been part of the dominant culture.

Literacy and Math Pedagogy Courses

Students seeking elementary education certification take courses treating the content and pedagogy for literacy, mathematics, social studies and science. While all these courses embrace teaching for equity, the focus here is on reading and mathematics, two critical areas of the achievement gap in light of assessments mandated by the No Child Left Behind legislation

(U.S. Department of Education). These courses build on the foundation courses but also focus on skills and attitudes needed to reach diverse learners in an elementary setting.

Literacy

Candidates majoring in elementary education all take the "Literacy for Primary Learners" course. The course is taught from a sociocultural perspective. Sociocultural theorists maintain that literacy is "not always about reading in the traditional sense of decoding a text and extracting meaning from it" (Hammerberg, 2004, p. 649). Boyd & Brock (2004) note that "teachers and children represent different cultural and linguistic backgrounds; a sociocultural theoretical lens calls attention to cultural and linguistic differences" (p. 5). One major aspect of the course involves a focus on culturally responsive literacy instruction. Like the constructivist course, the literacy course also outlines the major principles of culturally responsive teaching as noted by Geneva Gay (2000). The course also addresses the importance of culturally responsive communication and communicative competence. This course helps to challenge candidates' assumptions about literacy development for culturally and linguistically diverse children. For example, the course involves a great deal of reading and discussion about issues such as dialects, vernacular, registers and the misnomer of "Standard English." In one classroom exercise, the candidates respond to a position statement such as: "Speaking in Appalachian Regional Dialect, African American Vernacular English or Spanish is fine at home, but at school, students must read and write in Standard English." The candidates have to take one of the following positions regarding this statement: Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. They group themselves according to how they respond and then engage in reflection, discussion and debate. They also discuss the notion of Standard English being regarded as the "language of power" and how other dialects are not linguistically inferior but are perceived that way by those who hold power in mainstream settings like schools and workplaces (Au, 1993; Delpit, 2006).

In the literacy course the candidates are also assigned readings that promote self-reflection. They read texts by Parker Palmer (1998) and spend much time reflecting on his notion that "we teach who we are." They engage in reflective writing assignments where they have to answer Palmer's question, "Who is the self that teaches?" The candidates also read thought-provoking texts about opportunities and challenges faced by White teachers who often teach students who have different cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds from their own. For example, they read an article by Debbie Diller (1999), a White teacher, who reflects on her teaching of minority students in Texas. Diller is very candid and shares some painful lessons about the cultural conflicts and misunderstandings that transpire between her and her students. The candidates who take the literacy course relate well to Diller's experiences and dilemmas. Additionally, they read texts by Vivian Paley (2000), a White teacher who reflects in her writing about working with culturally diverse students. Since the vast majority of the candidates who take this class are White, these kinds of texts resonate with them and allow them to apply what they have learned from these authors to their own teaching contexts.

In this course, candidates also spend much time examining the needs of English Language Learners (ELLs). They explore some of their own perceptions and ideological debates about students and families who do not speak English through readings, discussions and reflective writing. The students learn about some of the current instructional approaches, such as additive and subtractive programs, and critically examine how they affect ELLs. They also learn about the role of parental involvement in working with all learners and how to effectively interact with their students' parents, including those who are English Language Learners. In addition, the candidates write a parental involvement paper and develop a plan that promotes outreach to the parents and families of students from a variety of cultural, ethnic, social and linguistic backgrounds. Candidates have remarked that this assignment is very beneficial and makes them think deeply about how to establish positive interactions with parents who may be different from them.

Mathematics

Multiculturalism and culturally responsive teaching is also a key theme in the teaching mathematics sequence for elementary education majors. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) has called for mathematics reform that is driven by deep knowledge of conceptual understanding as opposed to rote memorization of facts, rules and procedures (NCTM, 2000). Hiebert et al. (1997) refer to a classic work by Skemp (1987) that distinguishes between ". . . instrumental understanding as knowing what to do or the possession of a rule and the ability to use it . . ." and "relational understanding as knowing what to do and why . . ." (as cited in Hiebert et al. 1997, p. xi). These authors stress the importance of relational understanding over instrumental understanding. Constructing mathematical concepts using contextual problems directly related to the child's world represents recent reform in mathematics pedagogy. However, such reform measures may not be reaching African American students. Achievement gaps persist when accounting for race and SES (Lubienski, 2007). Lubienski (2002), citing a key study of NAEP data of 1996 and 2000 done by Strutchens and Silver (2000), report that African American students are more likely to report a belief that "There is only one correct way to solve a math problem" and that "Learning mathematics is mostly memorizing facts," perhaps reflecting the approach by which they are taught (as cited in Lubienski, 2007, p. 272). Lubienski's work documents the mathematics achievement gap between African American students and their White peers even when SES is accounted for. It is critical, therefore, that culturally responsive teaching be used for mathematics instruction. Ladson-Billings (1997) posits that culture is critical to the teaching of mathematics: "There are those who suggest that mathematics is 'culture free' and that it does not matter who is 'doing' mathematics; the tasks remain the same. But these people do not understand the nature of culture and its profound impact on cognition" (p. 700).

The literature on achievement of mathematics for students of color suggests the importance of a contextual, problem-solving, approach to mathematics that is infused with the students' culture. In light of this, a key assignment for this course is the design of a mathematics game that demonstrates cultural

sensitivity along with sound principles of math pedagogy. The games involve a problem-solving component that also celebrates diverse cultures. For example, one student designed a geometry game for early grades learning based on Navajo Art. The culture is celebrated along with sound principles of math teaching.

Within the math course, students work in a diverse field setting where they design math lessons that focus on problem-solving. The field component of the course is a key factor in the preparation of candidates to embrace multiculturalism for math instruction. Students are placed in classrooms at a local school, which has the following racial demographics: 55% White, 34% African-American, 2% Hispanic, 2% Asian and 7% other; and 13% of the student population receives special education services, 3% are English Language Learners and 58% of the population qualify for free and reduced lunch (Fayette County Public Schools, 2010a). Students work with mentor teachers who have been identified by the school principal as being strong in the area of teaching mathematics and complete weekly field work in these classrooms. By the end of the semester each candidate teaches a problem-solving mathematics lesson that is observed and evaluated by both the university professor and the classroom teacher. Students reflect on their field work in class discussion and in their own writing about the field. Through class discussion and writing, students reflect on the unique problems of teaching mathematics to culturally diverse learners.

Elective Courses Devoted to Teaching for Equity

In addition to courses in foundations and pedagogy for reading and math, the program has a strong commitment to courses devoted to issues of race and ethnicity exclusively. These courses are unique in the sense that they attract both education majors and majors outside of the education program and that they are part of the university's general education curriculum.

"The Immigrant Child" is a course devoted to the issues surrounding the immigrant child's experiences in American schools. A primary text for this course is *Children of Immigration* by Carola Suarez-Orozco and Marcelo Surarez-Orozco (2001), a key work that explores the various

psychosocial dimensions of life as an immigrant child. Students in this course come to understand the psychological challenges faced by immigrant children as they create a new identity for themselves. A key concept expounded upon by the authors is the notion of "social mirroring," where the authors refer to child psychologist D. W. Winnicott who described how a child's perception of his/her self is "profoundly shaped by the reflections mirrored back to her by significant others" (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, p. 98). This theoretical concept of social mirroring is brought home to the students by virtue of a field assignment at an area elementary school that has a sizeable concentration (11%) of English Language Learners, and where approximately 40% of the student population is comprised of students of color including African American, Hispanic, Asian and other ethnicities. At this school 43% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch (Fayette County Public Schools, 2010b). This field assignment, in particular, involves students working with ELL learners as language partners offering one-on-one assistance. The ELL learners are either immigrants or children of immigrants. The students in the course work closely with these immigrant children (who are in kindergarten, first or second grade) and then reflect on these experiences in an online journal function set up via "Moodle," a web-based courseware package available to the university community. The benefits of the online journal allow the instructor to respond to student reflections in a timely manner. Students' developing insights into the worlds of immigrant children are illuminated by their online reflections.

The course, "Race, Ethnicity, and Social Class in American Education," examines the American educational system within the broader scope of race, ethnicity and social class. The course focuses on the structural inequalities of schools, despite the fact that schools profess to provide equal opportunity to all students regardless of status differences. Core texts include works by Jonathan Kozol (2005), Beverly Tatum (2007), Theresa Perry (2003) and Gary Howard (2006). The course provides numerous opportunities for students to do the "inner work" to examine their experiences and perceptions regarding race, ethnicity and social class. One powerful example of self-examination is a class activity where students have to verbalize the myths, images and stereotypes that they possess about different cultural groups. The

students get into small groups and are given a particular cultural group to discuss. Students initially feel uncomfortable engaging in this activity, but the goal is for students to acknowledge their preconceived notions about others and think about how stereotypes can influence teachers' interactions with and instruction of culturally diverse students. One compelling course assignment that promotes deep self-reflection requires the students to visit a community agency that serves a racial or ethnic group that is different from their own, such as a church/worship center, library program or community center. They then write a reaction paper based on their experiences. During this assignment, students gain some sense about what it means to be in the "minority" and not part of the dominant culture in a given situation. This assignment really makes an impression on students and they often comment that it is "eye-opening" and should continue to be required, as it helps them to connect the important themes of the course in a real-life context.

Program Assessment

Assessment Measures

A commitment to equity pedagogy would not be complete without appropriate and responsible assessment. As indicated above, students complete a variety of assignments that promote critical reflection, such as reaction papers, online journals, lessons plans and field reflections and special assignments geared to meeting the needs of culturally diverse students. All such assignments are assessed by individual instructors, representing a means of documenting students' developing sensitivity and awareness of the unique needs of culturally diverse learners. While there is not a standard rubric to assess diversity knowledge for every course, individual instructors develop rubrics and/or other means of assessing this developing sensitivity. For example, in the course on immigrant children, students maintained an online journal to capture their insights as they worked with English Language Learners. The journal entries were assessed according to depth, detail and the ability to demonstrate the awareness of how cultural differences manifest themselves in a classroom.

In addition, the program has implemented a continuous assessment plan to monitor candidates' developing proficiencies toward teaching competence. As part of this continuous assessment plan, the program faculty, along with an outside advisory board comprised of local teachers and principals, students and university faculty and administrators, review and update each year an overall plan specific to diversity enhancement. Particular goals of this enhancement plan have included increasing efforts to recruit teacher candidates of color, fostering local community-university relationships and encouraging our teacher candidates to interact with diverse education candidates from other campuses. Progress toward these goals is evaluated each year by the program faculty.

A key component of the overall assessment plan is devoted to evaluating candidates' proficiencies in teaching diverse learners. Because such proficiencies develop over time, the program assesses knowledge, skills and dispositions related to diversity at key checkpoints within the candidates' tenure in the program. The first checkpoint is admission to the program. After taking the initial education courses, candidates who meet eligibility criteria may apply for program admission. At the admissions interview, candidates are asked questions related to their experiences and knowledge of working with diverse learners in order to assess the candidate's awareness and sensitivity to the various dimensions of human diversity. Candidates' responses to these questions are scored according to a three-point rubric, where Target (3 points) represents a strong response, Acceptable (2 points) represents an acceptable response and Unacceptable (1 point) represents a weak response. This information allows program faculty to understand candidates' existing cultural awareness and influences the teaching of concepts related to diversity in the classroom.

The second checkpoint is an interview in the junior year that precedes each candidate's practicum and student teaching experiences. During this interview, each candidate is asked about the extent to which he/she is comfortable with the task of working with culturally diverse students in terms of planning lessons, classroom management and creating and maintaining a healthy classroom climate. By this point all elementary education majors have had considerable field experience for each subject (reading, math, social studies and science) in a diverse

classroom setting. Again, these are scored accordingly and factored into the overall assessment of the candidate prior to practicum and student teaching.

Student teaching is an important culminating experience for each teacher candidate. Multiple means of assessing each student teacher are an important program responsibility. Specifically, of these multiple assessments, two key assessments are described here because of their focus on teaching diverse learners. These two key assessment measures include a document known as the Teacher Work Sample and the final evaluation by the cooperating teacher.

Teacher Work Sample

The Teacher Work Sample is a portfolio of assignments that documents all the essential competencies that must be demonstrated by student teachers. These competencies are organized according to the Kentucky Teacher Standards as outlined by the Kentucky Educational Professional Standards Board (Kentucky Educational Professional Standards Board, 2010). In completing the teacher work sample, each student teacher provides evidence of effective lesson planning, sequencing of instruction, assessing and reflecting on his/her teaching, along with collaborating with school personnel and attending to his/her professional development. Each student teacher has several tasks to complete. Notably, one task focuses on collaborating to address special learning needs (the collaboration task), and another task requires student teachers to analyze classroom assessment data (the data analysis task) in order to identify achievement gap groups such as English Language Learners, special needs students and students from underrepresented populations (i.e., African American students and other students of color). For the purpose of this paper, the twelve teacher work samples from the current academic year were used to identify and document specific instances of culturally responsive teaching.

Evidence from the Teacher Work Sample

Program faculty members evaluate each teacher work sample in its entirety to provide a final summative evaluation of student teachers' competencies and dispositions. Of interest here is evidence from the aforementioned collaboration task, which when analyzed according to a program rubric, showed that four candidates scored at the acceptable level (meets expectations) and eight candidates scored at the target level (exceeds expectations). On this collaborative task, some student teachers chose to address the needs of English Language Learners. One such student teacher designed a collaboration plan specific to the needs of a Hispanic student with limited English proficiency who was able to read English but not able to understand what she read. In collaboration with the ESL teacher, her cooperating teacher and the child's parents, this student teacher developed a detailed and comprehensive learning plan to improve the child's vocabulary, comprehension, speaking skills and fluency. In the plan this student teacher demonstrates culturally responsive teaching by embracing and validating the child's culture and forming a relationship with the child. Gay (2000) posits that culturally responsive pedagogy involves affirming the learner's cultural background, developing caring relationships with students and building bridges between the child's home and school cultures. The following statement from this student teacher's plan captures the essence of culturally responsive pedagogy:

> . . . I believe forming a relationship with Marie (a pseudonym) will help to create the most effective learning experiences for Marie. I also believe this relationship will serve as an opportunity to build a bridge from her home life to school life. . . . Through validation and our relationship, Marie will feel more comfortable to expand as a learner.

In addition to the collaborative plan, each student teacher must administer a variety of assessments and then analyze this data and reflect on student learning. This process culminates in the data analysis task which provides yet another example of evidence that the student teacher strives for equity in her/his

overall approach to teaching. Review of this task reveals how the student teachers reflect on achievement "gap groups" within their teaching environment relative to specific learning objectives. Typically the gap groups involve culturally and linguistically diverse learners. This task allows student teachers to show their sensitivity to the particular learning challenges of teaching for equity.

Evidence from Evaluations by Cooperating Teachers

While the teacher work sample provides valuable evidence of dispositions of a student teacher's propensity to teach for equity, another important source is the final evaluation by the cooperating teacher. The final evaluation completed by the cooperating teacher is a comprehensive instrument organized according to ten categories that align with the Kentucky Teacher Standards. Of particular interest are the indicators specific to diversity. For example, two such indicators assess the extent to which the student teacher "incorporated a multicultural/global perspective in lessons" and the extent to which the student teacher "included strategies that address diversity." A cooperating teacher gives a rating of Target (exceeds expectations), Acceptable (meets expectations), Unacceptable (does not meet expectations) or Not Observed, for each indicator. A review of the scores on the two aforementioned indicators targeting diversity reveals that the majority of these scores are in the Target range. Specifically, of the 24 total responses on the 2 indicators, results showed 3 responses as Not Observed (approximately 12% of the total responses), 5 responses as Acceptable (approximately 21% of the total responses) and 16 responses as Target (approximately 67% of the total response). Scores on these particular indicators provide another source of evidence that teacher candidates are able to attend to the needs of diverse learners. On several fronts, program assessments document the skills and dispositions of teaching culturally diverse learners.

Conclusion

Current trends in American schools suggest a need now more than ever for classroom teachers to be leaders in the realm of teaching for equity. As classrooms become more culturally and linguistically diverse, a predominantly White teaching force must respond to the challenge of rethinking traditional classroom practices. Responsible teacher preparation is at the heart of this challenge. As teacher educators, we are called to embrace, as Howard (2006) asserts, transformationist pedagogy: "the place where our passion for equity intersects with our cultural competence and leads to culturally responsive teaching in our classrooms and schools" (p. 133). Such a place in teacher preparation can only be attained through a systematic, multi-faceted and integrated approach that allows teacher candidates to transform themselves and see the world in new ways. Seeing the world in new ways means dispelling traditional notions of teaching that assume culturally diverse learners must assimilate into mainstream dominant culture, ignoring the richness of diverse cultural perspectives. Teacher preparation programs that embrace transformationist pedagogy can create classroom teachers who celebrate diversity and, in turn, empower both their students and themselves.

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The Challenges and Potential of Preservice Teacher *Praxis*: A Freirean Model for Service-Learning

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Abstract

This paper examines the potential for and challenges of using a critical approach to service-learning, based on Freire's notions of praxis and dialogue, as part of an introductory education course. Although any service-learning project runs the risk of falling prey to the more traditional approach, which involves a pedagogy designed to enhance understanding of the profession of teaching and prepare future teachers to use service-learning in their own classrooms, the authors examine the obstacles to and possibilities for a critical approach in a particular program in which students tutor homeless children and work in a low-income neighborhood community center. Specifically, they look at the ways in which the service is critical from a Freirean perspective on the one hand, and the obstacles encountered to fully prescribing to such an approach.

Introduction

Service-learning is a significant component of many instructors' curriculum in universities across the nation. What differentiates service-learning from community service is that the former is credit bearing, it involves a reciprocal relationship between those serving and those served in meeting a community

need and it involves reflection that enhances a deeper understanding of course content (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). In this paper we look at the challenges to and potential for using a more critical approach to service-learning within the context of an introductory education course that incorporates more intentionally Freire's notions of *praxis* and dialogue. Any service-learning course runs the risk of holding to the relative comfort and stability of a more traditional approach that emphasizes collaboration and more deliberate, patient approaches to change among community agencies and institutions of higher education. The focus of this approach is an emphasis on enhancing understanding of the profession of teaching and preparing preservice teachers to use service-learning in their classrooms. The purpose of our paper is to examine the obstacles to and possibilities for a more critical approach, where preservice students, university faculty and agency personnel consider more activist approaches to service and social change (here we are not referring to how Freire used the term "activism," action without reflection). In order to do so we explore the education course curriculum as a vehicle for encouraging preservice students to become true advocates of change that will constructively affect the lives of the individuals who are served by the community agencies and also encourage authentic, self-determined change among the policies and practices of the agencies themselves.

Perspective/Theoretical Framework

A framework based on Freire's notions of dialogue and *praxis* informs the analysis. In such a context we as educators address with our students the systemic causes of human suffering and empowerment to engage in *praxis* (Freire, 2003) in order to bring about transformation. In the context of service-learning this involves getting students to examine *why* those whom they serve are in the situation they are in. It involves students seeing humans' incompletion such that they enter into dialogue with those served to learn *their* needs and reflect and act (Freire) to work toward meeting those needs. As Freire pointed out, this dialogue demands a humility on the part of, in this case, the university students, and a trust in those served.

Freire (2003) asserted that one of the most dangerous challenges to attaining liberation is that the reality of oppression takes in the oppressed themselves and subsequently "acts to submerge [their] consciousness" (p. 51). He posited that to break free from this domestication it is necessary to engage in *praxis*, "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51). The dialogue of which Freire spoke, that which is liberating and critical and assumes action, must involve the oppressed at every stage of their journey toward liberation.

It is in this framework that we examine the service-learning component of the introductory education course in terms of both student engagement with the underlying social, political and economic issues surrounding the lived experiences of those served and engagement with those served themselves.

Challenges to and Potential for Critical Student Engagement

On the surface, community-based service-learning in constructivist-oriented teacher education seems to offer some rich possibilities for community transformation initiatives within a framework of critical pedagogy. Programs whose mission includes the development of teacher-leaders who intentionally critique entrenched educational institutions and seek to work toward social justice would seem to demand that candidates assume a Freirean approach to their service-learning experiences. As teacher education-based service-learning continues to mature and evolve, candidate service-learning experiences grounded in a critical pedagogy approach deserve serious consideration as viable models for effective and worthy elements of efforts to prepare thoughtful educators.

The preservice education students who participate in these service-learning activities are enrolled in F200: "Examining Self as Teacher," an introductory, pre-methods course designed for any and all students considering teaching as a career. This course uses standard introduction to education texts, assigned readings, individual and group projects and other elements that serve to introduce students to the social and cultural contexts of schooling in the United States, as well as to the realities of the teaching profession. Most of the F200 students are in their first

year of college. Most are White, middle class and female, aged 17-20. Service-learning provides an opportunity for students to work with youth through community agencies designed to provide needed social services for children and families experiencing poverty, abuse and cultural alienation or discrimination. These agencies include an after-school tutoring program with multiple sites for children from homeless families, a community center serving a large Latino/a population and a program for students aged 18-21 with special needs. The course requires students to engage in 12 hours of volunteer service at such an agency, engaging in projects and activities with youth that are deemed important by the agency itself and accepted by the course instructor as valuable and appropriate for the curricular content of the course. Reflection is a key element of the work; students address directed questions explaining what their service-learning experiences have meant to them in terms of their personal and professional development with regard to issues of diversity, social justice and pedagogy.

For many students, however, their service-learning in the introductory education course is the first time that they have been exposed to the lived experiences of those in urban areas. Many college students come to the course with preconceived notions and stereotypes about urban youth. Darling-Hammond (2002) noted that despite the fact that youth receive significantly unequal educational opportunities due to their social status and their race, not all teachers will have been informed about these inequalities. Further, she contended, the widespread societal view is that students' lack of achievement is their fault and their responsibility. In order to effectively teach diverse learners, one must develop an understanding of individual students "in nonstereotypical ways" (p. 209) and at the same time recognize and understand the cultural and contextual impacts on their lives and their learning (Darling-Hammond). This, Darling-Hammond posited, must not assume a "romantic pity" (p. 209) mindset, which, though well-intentioned, neglects acknowledgement of who the individuals really are. Rather, she noted, teachers need to be able to empathize with others' lived experiences and learn to see each individual as a person and a learner. Howard (1999) posited that empathy "requires the suspension of assumptions, the letting go of ego, and the release of the privilege of non-engagement" (p. 73). He described empathy as a "healing

response" because it permits us as Whites to connect with others who view diversity from a different perspective. Gladson-Billings (2001) maintained that a factor in seeing students as they are and their potential entails perceiving how their lives are connected to the teacher himself/herself; if students are not able to be productive members of society, then the attempt to promote justice is not advanced and the quality of life is reduced for everyone. In their call for culturally responsive teaching (CRT), Gay and Kirkland (2003) noted that such instruction involves teaching African, Native, Latino and Asian American students through the lenses of these students' own cultures, perspectives and experiences.

As the students in the introductory education course reflect on their service-learning experiences, many develop a deeper understanding of the political, social and economic underpinnings of the lived experiences of those with whom they work, and many of the myths with which they entered the course are dispelled. Often, however, the extent to which students become engaged in critical analysis is less than desirable. Many fall short of committing to active advocacy for systemic transformation. Preservice students acknowledge that many of their own previously held stereotypes regarding the lives and intentions of individuals in the community have been drastically altered or even destroyed through their service-learning experiences. However, relatively few show any observable or stated inclination to engage in more proactive, critical community-based activities that would reflect a significant change in their attitudes and practices toward community transformation, as Freire might encourage.

Praxis for these students is beyond their scope of intention; many see their service-learning as the outer parameters of what they are willing to do toward social justice. They do not see their personal responsibility reaching outside these boundaries. There are several possible reasons for this mindset. The development of a deep understanding of social justice and what is involved to effect it takes time. The hope would be that in addition to their taking on critical advocacy strategies, the students would make a commitment to teaching for social justice in their own classrooms. One semester, however, is not long enough for many to fully grasp the concept of social justice, let alone make a commitment to act on its behalf. Gladson-Billings (2001) noted

that teaching that fosters sociopolitical consciousness involves knowledge of the larger sociopolitical ethos of the world in which they (teachers) live; a commitment to the public good; and integration of this commitment into the curriculum so that youth have opportunities to critically engage in the social issues. Another possible reason that students in the education course do not see their personal responsibility reaching outside the boundaries of service-learning is their lack of confidence in the country's political structure. Some students have verbalized that if they thought it would do any good they would write letters to legislators but they doubt that it would yield positive results. A further possible reason for lack of commitment to social justice advocacy is that some might negatively associate such a commitment with leftist efforts that run counter to meritocratic notions or notions of "color blindness" that they have internalized growing up. Classroom dialogue often reflects this. Gay and Kirkland (2003) noted that preservice students often attempt to divert conversations about race to class, gender and individualism. Other ways students try to shift focus in these conversations are to avoid participation; note that they know someone in the specific ethnic/racial group being discussed who doesn't subscribe to those particular behaviors, or conversely, that they know someone who is not in the ethnic/racial group who believes/acts the same way; and an apparent commitment to fostering educational equity, but a lack of critical, in-depth thought with regard to altering their own behaviors (Gay & Kirkland).

With all this said, some students do seem to acquire both an understanding of the significance of social justice and a desire to work toward it. Freire (2003) proposed a "problem-posing" approach to education, in which students come to see critically "*the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (p. 83). A problem posing approach involves dialogue as an integral element in aiding students and teachers together to see reality; the students become "co-investigators" with the teacher to critically intervene in reality to effect change toward a more socially just society (Freire). A problem-posing approach is utilized in the introductory education course through varied means: guided written reflections; in-class discussions involving

the social, political and economic forces that play themselves out in the lived experiences of those served; profiles on students' respective service-learning sites; letters to the editor or a legislator (though we cannot demand that they send them); and art projects depicting personal growth through service-learning. Student engagement with these assignments demonstrates different degrees of effort and understanding of the greater systemic factors involved in the lives of those with whom the students work.

Assignments shared by Gay and Kirkland (2003) provide ways to counter the resistance of students to critical and cultural consciousness as well as self-reflection. They include, but are not limited to, telling students at the outset that they "are expected to 'think deeply and analytically,' and to 'check themselves'" (p. 184) regarding topics under investigation, and "to carefully examine their feelings about what they experience" (p. 184); telling students to consider how what they've learned in the course influences them both as human beings and teachers; having students collaboratively create position statements about multicultural education for "skeptics, friends, colleagues, and family members" (p. 185); and having students re-create "major U.S. icons, symbols, and celebrations . . . to make them more inclusive of ethnic and cultural diversity" (p. 186).

A curriculum that implements such practices noted above affords the potential for students to become more critically engaged in their service-learning projects as they relate to assigned texts and class discourse about issues of diversity, social justice and pedagogy. It is important to remain cognizant of the fact that for many students the introductory course is just a beginning of a journey, and though many do not commit to advocacy strategies at this point, many do indicate that the course makes them consider the issues addressed from alternate perspectives, and many demonstrate an empathy for the other. As they progress through the teacher education program, which places an emphasis on urban education, the hope is that they will become more mature in cultural competence both personally and professionally and more dedicated to social justice advocacy in general.

Challenges to *Praxis* and Potential for Dialogue with Those Served

Reconciling some of the accepted tenets of meaningful service-learning with those of critical pedagogy constitutes a highly problematic task when confronted with issues surrounding institutional forces. Social service agencies, schools and other entities which serve as appropriate sites for service-learning in teacher education constantly struggle with issues related to the political, social and economic realities of their structures, operations and public expectations. Consequently, significant tensions can arise between teacher education programs that advocate, or even insist upon, activist social transformation (again, we are not referring to how Freire used the term "activism") and service sites that may well find such efforts to be counterproductive in the all-too-practical world of their local situations. These tensions prove especially challenging in terms of the fundamental service-learning principle that service-learning sites must be responsible for determining needs to be served by teacher education programs and candidates, rather than those programs assuming that initiatives grounded in critical pedagogy and political activism are necessary for the social transformation of communities.

From the perspective of teacher education, similar concerns manifest themselves, if in different ways. It has proven to be a tremendous challenge to convince young candidates in teacher education from relatively comfortable backgrounds, most only recently removed from their role as subservient students in public schools, that they should assume the role of proactive change agents in unfamiliar settings operated by unfamiliar adults. Furthermore, the constant transition and turnover of personnel—students from semester to semester, agency employees working in high-turnover jobs, and agency clients who are often in unstable, transitory life situations—renders maintaining open lines of communication, collaboration and trust quite difficult. Combined with the all-too-real need for most social agencies, including public schools, to act in ways that respect and placate the authority and agendas of those who fund and evaluate their programs, the notion of an activist, critical approach to service-learning and preservice teacher education typically fails to gain much traction. Moreover, as an accepted yet still evolving pedagogical concept, service-learning itself wrestles with the widespread, more reactive approaches of collaboration and

benign support being challenged by activist constructions that encourage political activism, overt critical analysis and confrontational policies and practice as essential to authentic community engagement and progress. Two examples from the experience in service-learning offer instructive cases of the ways in which such tensions arise.

One is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to providing tutoring services to children from families that are homeless. Its primary mission is to support the efforts of public schools to provide stable, effective instruction to children who find themselves in the throes of uncertainty, confusion, disenfranchisement and stigmatization both socially and educationally. The organization relies heavily on funding and donations from corporations, businesses, private individuals, government and traditional philanthropic organizations such as United Way; and it works extensively with faith-based locations as well as other venues. Given these conditions, it is a serious question as to whether an open, critical approach to service-learning would be seen as appropriate or welcome by the organization. Such an approach might be seen as suspicious, threatening, conspiratorial or counterproductive to those who support the organization with resources and publicity.

Would such an approach be truly supportive of the children the organization is designed to serve? Perhaps; if effectively done it would open the eyes of the families and children to the nature of their situation and could theoretically provide them with skills to challenge these conditions—much as Freire envisioned. Alienation and avoidance of the basic mission—supporting children in their required schoolwork and providing a place and service of security and stability—would be openly confronted and perhaps diminished. But perhaps not: The threat of alienating funders and other supporters—including parents who would be reluctant to place themselves in risk-taking situations—is real and powerful.

The other service site is a venerable, long-standing social service agency serving part of the downtown area; it is over 80 years old. The neighborhood has long been low income and working class, and the service site provides basic services for local residents: food and clothing banks, day care, recreational activities, tutoring services and other services on an as-needed basis for all ages (preschool to elderly). The neighborhood is

undergoing significant demographic transition. Originally all Appalachian White, it now consists of White, African American and a rapidly growing Latino/a clientele. The organization faces many of the same concerns noted for the other organization. One of the issues with regard to a Freirean approach to service-learning here is competing ideas about the nature of oppression and the appropriate paths to social justice, given the diversity of the service population and the significant tensions and suspicions that exist within and between demographic groups. And yet it would be remiss of us as educators to *dis*engage in efforts to follow a Freirean model if our intentions are to work with our students toward bringing about social justice.

Freire called it a “farce” (2003, p. 50) when we acknowledge that as persons men and women should be free and at the same time we do nothing toward realizing this reality. While students often see their work at the sites as transforming, and indeed it can be in small, subtle ways, such as when they make connections with those served and provide them with tools to improve reading, communication and/or math skills, it is confined within the parameters set by those in charge at the sites. The environment is often one of a strict rigidity of behavior that university students commonly find offensive. So are we in fact engaging in a “farce” of sorts when we are not able to dialogue with those served regarding what *they* want and need? Rather than offering up a forum of engagement with them, those in control often fall prey to the demands of behavior management in a setting that itself can be reminiscent of domestication, for the sites’ very existence reflects oppressive influences of society. This ostensibly leaves little room for the problem-posing type of education that Freire espoused. While in shelters, the homeless are guided in ways to get out from under their situation, such as finding jobs, etc. However, the “program” does not include a space for problematizing their situations such that they are given the opportunity for *conscientização* and encouraged to engage in *praxis* to work toward transformation of the systemic forces undergirding their oppression. As Freire posited, “The solution is not to ‘integrate’ them into the structure of oppression, but to *transform that structure* [emphasis added] so that they can become ‘beings for themselves’” (p. 74).

Following Freire’s (2003) call for hope as part of a problem-posing education, we must continue to work toward discovering

and implementing new ways to encourage our preservice teachers to become culturally, socially and politically aware. One avenue this might take is to involve the students in dialogue with the service agencies to work with them in an effort to empower those served. Such a process holds the potential for improving students' critical thinking and communication skills; enhancing their cultural, social and political awareness; and increasing both their ability and desire to effectively work for social transformation.

Conclusions and Implications

Although the course curriculum includes opportunities that foster a forum for examining the underlying systemic social, political and economic factors that influence the lived experiences of those served through the service-learning program, i.e., homelessness, poverty, inequity, social/cultural capital, many students fail to fully grasp the concept of social justice and commit to engaging in socially active causes while some do indicate that that is a path they wish to pursue. The program itself falls short with regard to dialoguing with those served and working with them to problematize their lived situations. Challenges to engaging in such ways include working within the confines of the organizations/agencies, whose declared needs do not necessarily coincide with those of the individuals served. In addition, the curriculum has as part of its focus a state-defined teacher education; therefore, our efforts from a critical approach come from within such a focus. However, critical inquiry can potentially arise naturally from a service-learning course (Jovanovic, 2003) if properly facilitated. Further, students need to consider to what extent they are complicit in the oppressive forces at work in the lives of those served (Jovanovic). Frequently preservice teachers tend to accept the status quo instead of critiquing it, thereby underscoring the need for field experiences in sociocultural environments with which they are unfamiliar (Buchanan, Baldwin, & Rudisill, 2002). While the curriculum can address these things to an extent, the key to a Freirean model is dialogue *with the individuals served* and engagement in *praxis*.

Implications and potential for such an approach include community organizing; more critical interpretation of the agencies themselves *with* those in charge; and a greater focus on reflection and action on the fundamental political, social and economic forces at work, such as demonstrations, door-to-door campaigning and engaging in dialogue with the parents of the children served. A potential challenge here would be some students' objections or reluctance to engaging in such "social activism" (again, here we are not referring to how Freire used the term "activism"), as indicated in their journals. Another challenge would be access to parents at the homeless shelters; they are typically in other parts of the buildings when the students are there tutoring, and students are instructed not to acknowledge the students or parents when outside the context of the shelters due to privacy issues. And yet another challenge would be an attempt to navigate the institutional forces at play in the service-learning sites, along with the rigidity often observed by our students there. In the arranging that goes on between instructors of the course and the site directors, those being served—those suffering oppression—are left on the periphery, and compounding the day-to-day oppression from systemic political/economic forces of those served is a top-down model of control at the sites themselves, resulting in further domestication.

What we are addressing here is the concrete reality of a service-learning program in which are seen both potential for a more Freirean approach and obstacles to such an approach. Ethical responsibility requires us to consider using approaches in the service-learning requirement that reflect a grounding in critical pedagogy and social justice. This is essential for the consistency, integrity and inherent opportunities of such a program. In the greater context, "our political, social, pedagogical, ethical, aesthetic and scientific responsibility, as social and historical beings, as bearers of a subjectivity that plays an important role in history . . . is of unarguable importance" (Freire, 2005, p. 157). As we reflect, contemplate and wrestle with the questions raised in this paper, the following reminds us that such a quest *is* a challenge but one that must be taken on: ". . . I am involved with others in making history out of possibility, not simply resigned to fatalistic stagnation. . . . the future is something to be constructed through trial and error rather than an inexorable vice that determines all our actions"

(Freire, 1998, p. 54). It is in this spirit that we must look at the obstacles we have noted as challenges to be addressed as we work to more fully engage our students in the important issues surrounding social justice. This task might include talking with the agencies in an attempt to offer both them and the college students an opportunity to become more actively involved in empowering those served. This approach in turn would potentially provide the students with more tools and motivation to become effectively active in working toward social transformation. While we have articulated the obstacles to implementing a Freirean model for service-learning, we remain aware of the potential that such a model has for both the college students and those served by the agencies. Our intent, therefore, is to provide the reader with what needs to be overcome for a true Freirean model to be employed and possible ways to achieve its implementation.

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The Power of "We" Language in Creating Equitable Learning Environments

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Abstract

Effective teaching values the classroom as a learning community in which instructional approaches optimize learning for all students. Contrary to the principles of an equitable learning environment is the use of "me" language by teachers, a practice that promotes the role of teacher as high status and inadvertently excludes students from the learning process. This article promotes the use of "we" teacher language as a practice that is inconsistent with the principles of creating equitable learning environments for all students. While the implementation of inclusive language is a relatively simple change in teaching practice, the shift to "we" language requires a philosophical transformation in teaching and learning.

A middle school teacher poses a question to her students: "Who can tell me what's happening in this story?" Albeit an antithesis to the classroom as a community of learners, teachers in elementary, secondary and university classrooms often ask questions of the learners that position the teacher in the center of the learning process. The implications of a teacher-centered learning process are detrimental to the learning process for students and beg the following questions:

- Why is the teacher placed at the center of the learning process?

- How do students interpret the purpose of learning when the teacher's language places him/herself at the center of the learning process?
- What are the explicit and implicit messages given by teachers to students when "me" language dominates teacher language?
- How is the learning process shaped for students in a learning community when teacher language isolates/ excludes some learners from the process?

In many cases, teachers seem oblivious to the subtle, or not so subtle, messages they perpetuate in using exclusive first person language when communicating about learning tasks with students. The use of "me" language by teachers in interactions with students has negative implications for the development of classroom learning communities that are equitable and conducive to the learning of all students. Teachers must incorporate inclusive language that promotes learning and engagement for all members of the community regardless of status based on intellect, social skills, gender, race or socioeconomics.

Classroom as Learning Community

Much research documents classrooms as learning communities (Rogoff et al. 1996; Walsh, 2002; Wenger, 1998a, 1998b) characterized by a collaborative process of teachers and students learning together in a power structure that shapes the learning process but may not be equal (Busher, 2005). The classroom teacher is the person with the power and authority to set the culture of the classroom and establish the parameters of learning in the classroom. The concept of the classroom as a learning community occurs in practice when instructional practices enable learners to fully participate in the learning process alongside the teacher.

A community of practice offers opportunities for full participation (Wenger 1998b); therefore, teachers must orchestrate instructional experiences in the classroom in which all students are invited to fully participate in learning. Rogoff (2003) argues for guided participation that changes participation in the activities of the community. Teachers structure classroom

interactions that can either include or exclude students from the learning process.

Teachers frequently verbalize directions to students that position the teacher at the center of the learning process. Comments such as, "Tell **me** three reasons why the civil war started," remove the student from the learning process and locate the responsibility of learning on the teacher, the one person in the classroom who has likely acquired the content knowledge at hand. Further, the perceptions of the teacher as the primary motivation for learning hinders the student's desire to learn for her own purposes rather than for gratification of the teacher. Ultimately, teacher-focused language undermines the intent of the classroom as a learning community.

The use of "we" rather than "me" language by the teacher is a subtle, yet powerful, invitation and expression to join the classroom community of learning. Denton (2008) states that teacher words shape the learner's sense of identity. When teachers use "we" language, they place themselves with the students in the learning process rather than separate from the learning process. Although the teacher has already learned the content, the teacher is perceived as learning alongside the students and has overtly stated the expectation that students are fully engaged in the learning process. The classroom as a place of identity for the student has been achieved and all persons in the classroom are collectively engaged in the learning process.

While it could be argued that teacher language is not intentionally excluding students from the learning process, teachers need to use language that is consistent with the belief that classrooms are learning communities for all persons. Language that includes all persons in the learning process is essential.

Status in the Classroom

Every classroom contains status and power structures. In most elementary and secondary classrooms the role of teacher is central to the learning environment. Demonstrated by the location of the teacher's desk, the one-directional placement of student desks facing the teacher, the teacher's stance in front of students while teaching and the use of "me" language by the

teacher to co-opt students into the learning process, the teacher is indeed the central figure with high status in the classroom. Students then are positioned in a secondary role of lower status. When "me" language is the normative classroom discourse, teachers imply that student learning is performed for the teacher rather than for the student. How teachers use language can significantly influence perceptions of status and power in the classroom and the extent to which students engage in the learning community. Upon closer examination of the often subtle and sub-conscious structures of teaching and learning, a teacher-focused environment may unintentionally perpetuate an imbalance of status that promotes inequitable instructional practices.

Students learn to function within the observed and reinforced interactions between student and student, and between teacher and student. Although teachers may not consciously define status roles, they model high- and low-rank status through the classroom communities they create. Cohen (1994, 1998, 1999) inspires a framework of ensuring equity in classrooms by acknowledging and addressing status ordering in the classroom. In group settings like a classroom learning environment, status structures establish themselves according to a high or low rank based on perceptions of status within the group. These perceptions of student status affect participation in group processes and impact opportunities for learning.

As the authority position in the classroom, teachers are responsible for establishing expectations for learning, interaction and classroom procedures and for advocating for classroom interactions that promote equitable learning communities for all students. As Cohen (1994, 1998, 1999) suggests, if teachers do not adjust the status culture of the classroom, students will exert their power, often in ways that diminish and negate the learning potential. In essence, teachers need to address status issues to ensure that communities of learning flourish. For example, when a particular student talks more than other students, other students learn to be marginalized and talk less. Consequently, power structures are reinforced but not in ways the teacher intended. Floor time—the amount of time students are allowed to talk and dominate class discussion—is a status issue that requires intentional response from the teacher to level the status structures in the classroom. If teachers believe that all learners

can learn, then the teacher must enable ways in which all students are given opportunities for floor time. The use of inclusive teacher language is one approach in which teachers draw students in as shared participants to learn alongside the teacher and to reduce the status structure of the teacher as the center of the classroom. In essence, the teacher relinquishes her inherent status as teacher and enhances the status of students in the classroom.

Transforming "Me" to "We" Language

Teachers need a language of inclusivity to bring learners into the learning community as the use of exclusive teacher language significantly compromises the work of community building in the classroom. Numerous observations of classroom teaching with preservice and inservice teachers and university professors reveal a common pattern of teacher language: the use of the pronoun "me" when stating learning tasks to students. Even professional publications in the field of education fall short of promoting a communal sense of learning as evidenced in a recent issue of *Phi Delta Kappan* that includes teacher-centered language in teacher-student dialogue: "John, can you tell me about B? . . . Maria, can you tell me about the story? . . . Please tell me A through D in your own way or repeat for me what Maria said" (Hannel, 2009, p. 69).

At the core of good teaching is the belief that teachers must structure classroom environments and employ instructional methods that ensure optimum learning for all students. Teacher language creates a status structure that either invites or discourages student engagement. The language of collective pronouns such as "we" by teachers is a request to join the classroom community and to engage in the shared experience of learning (Johnston, 2004). Similarly, the use of "we" language is an invitation based on the belief that all students, regardless of status in the classroom, are extended an opportunity to be fully functioning members of the classroom. When teachers use "me" or "I" language, they give a subtle, but significant, message that the learning is done for the teacher rather than for the student. Students will be less motivated to engage in learning if the learning task does not personally benefit them. Thus, the teacher

must incorporate language that includes, rather than excludes, in order to build a learning community.

One way in which teachers make full participation possible is by the use of inclusive teacher language that promotes rather than disintegrates joint participation of the teacher and student in the learning process. In most scenarios in which "me" language is used, the personal pronoun could be omitted and the sentence would remain grammatically correct yet the message communicated to students is dramatically different. For example, "Tell me three reasons why the civil war started," could be stated as: "Tell us three reasons why the civil war started." The use of "us" implies that all students are expected to tune into the student's response to the teacher's question. When "me" is the personal pronoun, communication is a one-way conversation between one student and the teacher and inadvertently excludes other students. The message to the majority of the students is that they are permitted to tune out while one student and the teacher converse. Replacing the word "me" with "us" in teacher interactions communicates a shared community of learning rather than learning for the teacher. Examples of teacher questions and statements that reframe expectations of student learning from "me" or "I" language to "we" language are found in Table 1.

Shifting from "me" to "we" language is a relatively simple change, as indicated in Table 1, although it requires intentional self-examination of one's communication patterns while teaching. Perhaps the more significant shift in practice results when teachers examine the philosophical beliefs that undergird their instructional practices and are deeply embedded in action, particularly teacher language. Using inclusive language may readily become evident in communication patterns, but internalizing the philosophical underpinnings may be a longer transformational shift.

Table 1
Reframing "Me/I" Questions to "We" Questions

"Me/I" Questions:	"We" Questions:
Create a diagram for me that shows the parts of the water cycle.	Create a diagram for us that shows the parts of the water cycle.
Show me how you came up with that solution.	Show us how you came up with that solution.
Make me a pattern.	Make us a pattern.
When you have an answer to the question, let me know.	When you have an answer to the question, let us know.
Anyone want to give me a blend?	Anyone want to give us a blend?
Give me one example of something you did that made a connection for you.	Give us one example of something you did that made a connection for you.
Who can tell me what you're supposed to do for Wednesday's class?	Who can tell us what you're supposed to do for Wednesday's class?
Tell me what's happening.	Tell us what's happening.
Take out a piece of paper and write down for me what steps you took.	Take out a piece of paper and write down for us what steps you took.
Tell me what Juan did when you slammed the book.	Tell us what Juan did when you slammed the book.
Give me a summary with less than 20 words.	Give us a summary with less than 20 words.

Awareness of the alignment, or mal-alignment in some cases, between philosophy and language is the first step. For example, a change from exclusive to inclusive teacher language implies that the teacher values shared participation between teacher and student in the learning process. If teacher and student are co-learners, then representations of "me" in teacher language communicate expectations that collide with the principles of the classroom as a learning community and must be altered to include the marginalized learner. Teachers must relinquish the role of teacher as the sole owner of knowledge in the classroom. This can be a difficult shift.

Teacher language significantly shapes how teachers set the stage for engaging learning in the classroom. Creating a learning community requires that the teacher remain attentive and attuned to the implicit and explicit interactions in the classroom. Observing what and how students earn status, what factors create status among the group of learners, how students of differing status interact with each other and what practices teachers implement to facilitate equity in learning opportunities are important considerations for teachers. Changing instructional approaches to address status imbalances in the classroom can be unsettling for the learner and needs to be handled with care. In the event that a student dominates floor time, a teacher might say publically: “Let’s hear from someone whom we haven’t heard from yet today.” Initially a student may feel put off by such a statement and the statement may seem to negate the value of a learning community that the teacher is striving to create. Over time, learners will hear this statement as an invitation and a commitment to bring everyone into the circle of learning because each voice is valued and solicited.

The purpose of “we” language in the learning community is tri-fold: to diminish the power structures that teachers inherently hold in order to learn alongside students; to empower students of any status in the classroom to actively engage in the learning community; and to create equitable learning environments in which each student is valued as an individual and learning is optimized. Regardless of the teaching context, teachers can elect to employ language that promotes an equitable learning environment for all learners.

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