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ABSTRACT

This study hypothesized that discourses incorporating critical reflection on multicultural texts, lectures, and workshops in combination with autobiographical research on one's own teacher identity formation would deepen teacher candidates' realization of the importance of transformative multicultural education in teaching and learning and help move teacher candidates toward an anti-racist teacher identity. The study also hypothesized that teacher candidates, based on their teacher identify investigations, would be more receptive to notions of culturally responsive teaching and the importance of closing the achievement gap. Data were collected on 44 predominantly white, post-baccalaureate teacher candidates in the form of an autobiographical research project. Participants were given discrete autobiographical assignments that related to their identity formation as future teachers. Data from students' reflections confirmed both parts of the first hypothesis. Students embraced the importance of transformation and came to understand the latter was impossible without an identity shift that incorporated anti-racist, culturally responsive teaching practice. The importance of closing the achievement gap, however, was only overtly noted by one student. Students became aware of how they had been historically socialized into dominant culture perspectives where a certain invisibility of the underside of U.S. social policy has promoted privilege over equity and human rights. (Contains 78 references.) (SM)

# Connecting Teacher Identity Formation to Culturally Responsive Teaching

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**Connecting Teacher Identity Formation to Culturally Responsive Teaching**
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The educational reform report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future called attention to the importance of having teachers who can positively affect the schooling outcomes of children and youth rather than replicate situations where social class and ethnicity are the primary determinants of achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997). The need for multicultural reform is evidenced by beginning teachers who continue to "feel inadequately prepared and seldom choose to teach in multicultural schools, especially those with high rates of poverty" (Valli & Rennert-Ariev, 2000, p. 15). Teachers well-qualified in traditional teaching skills may not necessarily possess the multicultural knowledge, dispositions, and skills to meet the needs of culturally diverse student populations. Regardless of a classroom's extent of racial and cultural diversity, many experienced classroom teachers assume individual merit and perseverance alone is the key to academic success (Rios, 1991; Sleeter, 1992.)

Absent an identity that incorporates a transformative multicultural perspective, a teacher is likely to use mainstream teaching and learning approaches that can perpetuate an academic achievement gap between white students and children of color. A teacher's identity is influenced by ideological values of dominant social institutions (Althusser, 1971; Fendler, 1999). For example, because research documents that a "normal" white person can develop negative racial stereotypes at as young an age as 3 or 4 and grow in these perceptions into adolescence and young adulthood, Carter and Goodwin (1994) explain that it is imperative for teachers to understand their own racial identity formations in order to better serve children of color.

Banks (1993b) notes that "important aspects of our identity...are markers of *relational positions* rather than essential qualities" (emphasis added) (p. 5). Teacher

identity is dependent on shifts of positionalities according to varying social contexts (Banks, 1993b; Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). Hence, a teacher's agency and subjective identity are not assumed to be transcendent of dominant power relations. Nevertheless, historical arrangements of teaching, learning, and schooling are never fixed and inevitable – leaving open transformative possibilities.

Transformative multicultural education (see Banks, 1993a, 1993b, 1993d, 2001b, Howard, 1999; May, 1999; McLaren, 1994; Sleeter & Grant, 1999; Vavrus, 2002) necessitates the presence of teachers whose clarity of their own racial identity serves to affirm the identity of all students. To better serve their students, white teachers in particular should not be immobilized in white shame, guilt, and confessionals as they grow to recognize and reject the premises of color-blindness and white privilege (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997; Howard, 1999; Katz, 1978; MacLeod, 2001; McIntyre, 1997; Tatum, 1999a, 1999b; Thandeka, 1999). Since the ideology of white privilege can act "to delegitimate antiracist activity and to make accommodation to racism seem commonsensical and sane" (Roediger, 1999, p. 242), teachers should develop the capacity to maintain an oppositional, anti-racist identity. Yet, expressing a transformative multicultural perspective based in an anti-racist teacher identity is often contrary to the dominant discourse of public schools (Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Lee, 1998). In both public schools and teacher education programs multicultural discourse is commonly managed to limit anti-racist expressions (Vavrus, 2002). In this context teacher identities are understood as inseparable from teaching practices (see Richie & Wilson, 2000).

Teacher education can be central to helping teachers enhance the academic achievement and future life opportunities for all children and youth. While analyses of racism and experiences with populations of color may help move teacher candidates

toward a teacher identity with a multicultural perspective, teacher candidate resistance and denial of the actualities of racism in public schools and the larger society combined with traditional teacher socialization can restrict a teacher's identity for pursuing possibilities to help students of color to academically achieve (Vavrus, 2002). A promising pedagogy practice is multicultural autobiographical (or personal narrative) research that strives to deepen individual understandings of positionality (Clark & Medina, 2000; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Ford, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Sleeter, 1995a; 1995b). Banks (2001a) observes, however, that white teacher candidates experience difficulty in articulating the place of race in their family histories. Schoem (1993) notes that college students also have trouble integrating theoretical knowledge of racial identity formation with their personal experiences. Furthermore, multicultural researchers recognize a challenge in teacher identity formation in teacher education when a program's curriculum is fragmented and extended periods of time for multicultural discourse are unavailable (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Subrahmanyan, Hornstein, & Heine, 2000; Vavrus, 2002).

## Working Hypothesis

Recognizing that teacher "identities are produced through participation in discourse" and that teachers can "choose between competing discourses" (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 11), this study proceeded with a working hypothesis that discourses incorporating critical refection on multicultural texts, lectures, and workshops *in combination with* autobiographical research on one's own teacher identity formation will (a) deepen a teacher candidate's realization of the importance of transformative multicultural education in teaching and learning and (b) help move a candidate toward an anti-racist teacher identity. Additionally, it was hypothesized that teacher candidates, on the basis of their teacher identity investigations, would be more

receptive to notions of culturally responsive teaching (e.g., Gay, 2000; Irvine, 1992; 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and the importance of closing the achievement gap. Hypothesized was that autobiographical research would help teacher candidates recognize and articulate competing and conflicting socio-political ideologies that shape their subjective understandings and interpretations of their respective teacher identities – moving significantly beyond the technical notion of "teacher role."

This working hypothesis was premised on a context that included extended learning time for a cohort of preservice teachers in a learning community with a curricular theme of "Teaching for Social Justice." That is to say, an affinity identification with other members of the cohort would help teacher candidates explore the social and institutional discourses that contribute to the formation of their respective teacher identities and how it is possible to imagine new identities that empower historically underserved K-12 students (see Gee, 2001).

**Data Gathering Procedure**

44 post-baccalaureate teacher candidates who were enrolled as a cohort in a 2-year program were the subjects of this study. Data was gathered during the first year of the program, a full-time graduate-level teacher preparation program taught collaboratively by three faculty members. Data was in the form of an autobiographical research project that extended from October 2001 through June 2002. The cohort preservice teacher education students were given discrete autobiographical assignments that related to the formation of their identity as future teachers. 89% of the students were white and 73% were female. Students represented a cross-section of teaching levels: 39% elementary education and 61% secondary education, the latter representing the teaching fields of English, biology, geology, chemistry, social studies, drama, and art.

As a qualitative study, one purpose was to discover "new insights" by giving teacher candidates the opportunity "to speak for themselves" with an understanding that such a qualitative inquiry tends "to make phenomena more complex" (Sherman & Webb, 1988, pp. 5-6). The primary data sources were autobiographical assignments that required each student to use a combination of both images and written narration. No specified length was set for the assignments beyond critical reflection and engagement with each aspect of the autobiography as it related to forming their teacher identity.

Teacher candidates were provided the following overview in the program's Fall 2001 syllabus:

> You will be constructing drafts of a multimedia document that is based on autobiographical research leading to your social formation of a teacher identity. The format combines digitized images and written text....The process of autobiographical research is completed in incremental steps and includes making connections with family history, personal schooling and learning experiences, racial identity formation, and social justice.

As the project proceeded, the digital aspect proved cumbersome and distracting for many of the subjects and eventually was dropped as a requirement. Therefore, only the written data was analyzed. For this paper those two data points are analyzed. The first one combines student responses to their racial identity formation in the first quarter of the program, an end-of-quarter reflection on their autobiographical research, and interviews with students early in the second quarter. The second data source had candidates compare, after three academic quarters, their interrogated social justice perspectives to their application essays for admission to the program.

**Pedagogical Approaches and Assignments**

The faculty had generated the theme "Teaching for Social Justice" as the organizing concept for the curriculum. Undergirding this theme were the program's long-standing curricular elements of (a) democracy and schooling, (b) an anti-bias and

multicultural perspective, and (c) developmentally appropriate teaching and learning (see Vavrus, 2002, chap. 7; Vavrus, Walton, Kido, Diffendal, & King, 1999). The autobiographical research assignments into teacher identity formation were correlated with targeted reading assignments that were supported by workshops, lectures, seminars, and written responses to texts. These included a focus on families histories, ethnic identities, racial identity formation, and social justice. In addition to the specific texts and assignments described in following students, students were also reading and responding to texts that further offered them a critical perspective on schooling. These included *The American School, 1642-2000* (Spring, 2001), *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (Loewen, 1995), Gould's (1996) *The Mismeasure of Man*, and hooks' (1994) *Teaching to Transgress*. Students were also engaged in weekly "integration seminars" that served as a means to analyze their field experiences in public school classrooms and the local community (see Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) in comparison to the knowledge base that preservice teachers were acquiring through the program curriculum.

*Family histories.* During the first week of the program teacher candidates began reading selected chapters from Mitchell and Weber's (1999) *Reinventing Ourselves as Teachers: Beyond Nostalgia*. Besides writing a response paper and participating in a seminar on the text, preservice teachers wrote about themselves and their early family and schooling histories.

*Ethnic identities.* Continuing in the Fall 2001 quarter, teacher candidates followed a similar procedure as above after reading Ronald Takaki's (1993) *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* and were instructed "to relate your family history, your personal experiences with K-12 schooling/learning, and Takaki's [text] to your emerging identity as a teacher." This process was supplemented by a workshop

that focused on common stereotypes that can undermine the development of an anti-racist teacher identity. Students participated in small groups of 3-4 within the workshop and reported out key aspects of their findings to the whole group.

The first part focused on a stereotype of perceived "reverse racism" in affirmative action programs by many whites and incorporated statements from the *Initial Report of the United States of America to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* by the U.S. Department of State (2000) that reports on the continuation of overt and subtle forms of racist exclusions as a part of the national fabric of contemporary life:

> Issues relating to race, ethnicity, and national origins continue to play a negative role in American society. Racial discrimination persists against various groups.... The path towards true racial equality has been uneven, and substantial barriers must still be overcome [because] *de facto* segregation and persistent discrimination continue to exist. (pp. 2, 5)

Teacher candidates were then directed to consider the following items:

> Imagine that you are talking with someone who claims that affirmative action is "reverse racism" against whites. Using examples from *A Different Mirror*, how might you justify the necessity of affirmative action today for people of color to experience equity in housing, employment, health care, and schooling opportunities?

A second common stereotype relates to Asian-Americans labeled as "model minorities" in public schools. Students in a workshop were given the following prompt:

> Takaki describes how white leaders have applied the phrase "model minority."
> - Why does Takaki call this a "myth"?
> - At its root, why can this phrase be considered racist?
> - What detrimental effects do you imagine the use of this phrase can have on K-12 students when/if used by K-12 educators?

The third aspect of the workshop had students shift their attention to their autobiographical research assignment:

Discuss among yourselves how events described in *A Different Mirror* interacted with your family history. For example,

- In what ways might your family history have benefited and/or suffered as a result of the multicultural history of the U.S. Takaki describes?
- In what ways did your K-12 and undergraduate educationally experiences incorporate a multicultural history of the U.S.? How accurate or authentic was the historical understandings you took away from your previous schooling experiences?
- In light of the events described in *A Different Mirror*, how might the identity of today's "average" K-12 teacher have been affected?
- Discuss how your own teacher identity and perspectives might have been affected/altered based on your reflections of *A Different Mirror*.

*Racial identity formation.* Toward the end of that quarter the students read and responded in writing and seminar to Beverly Tatum's (1999b) *"Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" and other Conversations about Race.* At the same time teacher candidates were exposed to lectures and exercises that incorporated issues of racism with a particular emphasis on definitions (see, for example, Banks & Banks, 1997; Goldberg, 1993; Grant, & Ladson-Billings, 1997). This was considered critical for reasons that my previous research and experiences had found:

> Because racism as a field of study often elicits strong emotional reactions and resistance from pre-service and in-service teachers, an operational definition of terminology related to racism is important to include in the multicultural education of teachers. This is especially so with white teacher populations that tend to hairsplit on definitions as a means to distance themselves from the dynamics of racism. (Vavrus, 2002, p. 79)

A definitional foundation was supplemented by an analysis of the concepts of white privilege (see Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1999) and colorblindness (see Crenshaw, 1997). Emphasized was that the concept of race, including white, is a political category that does not hold biological legitimacy (Angier , 2000; American Anthropological Association, 1998; American Association of Physical Anthropology, 1996; Carter, 1997). Provided were examples from the most recent U.S. census that allowed individuals to self-identify their racial identification, a process that resulted in millions of citizens providing complex multi-racial profiles (United States Census Bureau, 2001). Described

was the sifting notion of racial identities that are generally based on an individual's social position within the larger society (Banks, 1993b; Dyson, 1994).

Next, racial identity statuses were examined in detail (see Helms, & Cook, 1999). Preservice teachers further interrogated their racial identities through a workshop that incorporated Howard's (1999) work on what it can mean for an individual to be a "transformationist," a disposition he equates with an anti-racist identity. Students were also exposed to an identity of a "white ally" as an "actively antiracist White person who is intentional in ongoing efforts to interrupt the cycle of racism" (Tatum, 1999a, p. 61; also see Blewett, 2000).

For this aspect of their autobiographical research, teacher candidates were required first to complete a draft of their racial identity formation in order for faculty to determine the degree to which the candidates were actually referencing curricular experiences they had been provided. The final version asked teacher education students to incorporate "specific information about your racial and ethnic identity formation."

*Social justice and identity.* At the beginning of the student's second academic quarter they read bell hook's *Teaching to Transgress* and Dewey's (1938/1974) *Experience and Education* and prepared the fourth stage of their autobiographical research into their teacher identity formation. Teacher candidates also received background lectures on gender and race and the importance that Dewey placed on the creation of social community in schools as a key basis for learning. Faculty revisited the importance of a deep interrogation of the political context of schooling because, as Dewey (1916) explained, "The conception of education as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind" (p. 112). Students

received the following prompt for this aspect of their autobiographical research: "The purpose of this version is to consider your perspective on social justice issues and to incorporate this information into a description of your emerging identity as a teacher for social justice."

Three weeks later during this same quarter students met with the faculty team for individual interviews as part of the program's assessment process. Among the prompts that the preservice teachers were informed that they should be prepared to discuss were:

- How has you identity formation as a teacher shifted thus far during the Teaching for Social Justice program, and how do you currently perceive yourself as a teacher?
- Based on your teacher identity shifts during the program, describe your identity changes in regards to how you will develop *academic* relationships with children and youth in public school settings.

*Reflection on teacher identity formation.* By the end the third quarter and the closing of the academic year, students had received a variety of curricular interventions designed to further emphasize the importance of having a social justice frame for entering teaching. In addition to learning activities previously noted, teacher candidates also focused on multicultural curriculum development (Banks, 2001; Cahan & Kocur, 1996), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995), democratic classroom management (McEwan, 2000) and a root cause of child abuse (Miller, 1990), issues related to popular education in Latin America (Hammond, 1998), cooperative learning approaches (see Adams & Hamm, 1998; Cohen, 1994), the example of core subject such as mathematics for promoting an equity pedagogy (Moses & Cobb, 2001; Shoenfeld, 2002), special needs populations and their families along with issues of disproportionality (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001), assessment approaches that can benefit all students (Stiggins, 2001), the importance of

caring and competent adults for the constructive the development the identities of adolescents (Head, 1997), and legal issues that emphasized the rights of students and teachers (Alexander & Alexander, 1995; Cary, Levine, & Price, 1997).

For the final version of their autobiographical research, preservice teachers were to compare and contrast how and if they perceived change in the formation of their teacher identity since the beginning of our program. To facilitate this assignment, students were given copies of their original application essays that were used as part of the admissions decision-making process by faculty. In order to be considered for admission to the program each student had to complete two short essays. The first one asked why the applicant wanted to be a teacher as well as why they were choosing our program. The prompt for the second admission's essay stated:

> It is virtually impossible to be raised in the culture of the U. S. without being taught racial, ethnic, gender and socio-economic class biases; yet teachers today must be prepared to work with children from many backgrounds. They must also be prepared to demonstrate a commitment to the highest ideals of U.S. society and of public education. (The Evergreen State College, 2001, p. 12)

As part of their admission's essay response applicants were asked to examine "your background, behaviors and experiences that have prepared you to face these issues. In light of your experiences consider challenges you may face in meeting the expectation to become an advocate for multicultural and anti-bias teaching" (p. 12).

The prompt for the version of their autobiographical research that concluded their first year in the program was the following:

> In this project you will re-read your two essays for admission to the program (copies to be distributed). In light of what you originally wrote prior to entering the program and your experiences in the "Teaching for Social Justice" program this academic year, you will critically reflect upon what it means to you *now* (a) to be a teacher and (b) to teach in schools where racism and other discriminatory biases are part of everyday life of classrooms and U.S. society and how you anticipate that you will respond to such biases.

> [This version] is a comparison/contrast essay. The expectation is that your essay will cite perspectives you provided in your two essays for admission and compare and contrast those perspectives to where you currently see yourself now in regards to the themes of those original essays. [This version] should articulate areas of teacher identity shifts you have experienced on the basis of being a member of the "Teaching for Social Justice" learning community. As appropriate, your essay can also describe how various program experiences have reinforced some of your original perspectives toward teaching and anti-bias actions that you brought into the program in September.

**Findings Part I: Racial Identity Formation and Anti-Racist Perspectives**

The first set of findings is based, as stated above, on cumulative data that included student responses to their racial identity formation, reflections on their autobiographical research, and faculty interviews with students. 80% of the teacher candidates (n = 35) made positive comments in regards to the growth in their *awareness* of racialized perspectives that they had not previously held and acknowledgement that the process was *beneficial* to their becoming teachers. All of these students acknowledged that they were attempting to develop identities that would be analogous to an *anti-racist transformationist*. The process leading to this realization was challenging for all of the students, best captured by one woman who stated:

> I feel as if I have been pulled apart and put back together. These past few months have been exhilarating; they have also been deeply distressing. As educated people, we like to think we have our biases sorted out. To find that digging deeper illuminates more underlying bias and misunderstanding is painful. Yet , I am grateful.

The personal investigations had "forced" an elementary education preservice teacher "to look straight in the eye of the extreme level of my dad's racism, and how this has affected the way in which I developed." The autobiographical research caused another preservice teacher to write, "I no longer want to continue on blindly" after realizing that "my racial identity and my identity as a teacher are intricately related." A male science teacher candidate noted how the notion of white privilege had been absent from his

identity as a teacher, but reached the conclusion that "if we are to become successful teachers, we must know our background, as this will have a substantial effect on how we present ourselves and how we view others, including our students."

Prior to enrollment in our graduate program, all of the subjects of this study had understood an additive approach, as one preservice teacher stated, as the equivalent of multicultural education "until this program." One woman "realized how many people are left out" of an additive curriculum. A future teacher stated that her change in "perspective is what will be important for my student – by integrating multicultural education throughout the year rather than just a day to Martin Luther King, Jr."

Some students were able to recognize the importance of being a *white ally* while acknowledging that they have not necessarily acted in this way. One white male recalled that even though he had not respected people who were racist and "I never participated in racist dialogue, but I didn't at the time confront racist remarks." In her development one student discussed her inability in the past to conceive of herself as white ally because "I have feared discussing race, particularly instigating such discussions, because I felt that my whiteness disqualified me from having a valid opinion on the matter." Another white female perceived the white ally role as "appropriate" and accessible but still "a work in progress." By seeing what identification as a white ally can provide a white teacher, one student came to understand the institutionalized nature of racism: "This blames the oppression not on specific individuals, but rather on the system that propels it." A social studies education student came to understand that although "I have had racist thoughts, I now realize that it was programmed into me." Another teacher candidate who had not previously "realized the depths to which racism continues to exist" was consciously

working on overcoming her sense of guilt "so that I will be able to work with others to 'interrupt the cycle of racism.'"

*Advocacy* for historically underserved students was another theme that arose. An art major commented that although "our democracy teaches us to be passive" she has become "much more aware of the social responsibility [of teaching] than I had realized" and now strives to "being more active as advocate" for youth. Another education student conceded that she came into the program with "a 'bell curve' idea of learning [and] now was taking more responsibility for all students learning."

Some of the students were able to articulate how they had overcome perceived boundaries among a focus on *academic studies*, creation of a *learning community* environment in classrooms, and a *commitment to a multicultural, anti-bias perspective*. One education student stated that she "thought I'd have to go underground" with her ideas, but had come to understand that "multicultural education, equality were actually conducive to good teaching." A science teacher candidate came to understand how her relations with students was an important intersection for being culturally responsive by making academic and multicultural connections. A social studies teacher candidate expressed a desire to avoid furthering a curriculum that has "an underlying assimilationist agenda." An English education student stated that she was grappling with her "sphere of influence" as a white ally while wanting to help "white affluent students broaden their world view to be more humane." An elementary education preservice teacher saw legitimacy in incorporating social justice into her classroom and "to live it with her students." A formerly resistant English major was able to realize through a field experience how his cooperating teacher was unconsciously closed to transformative multicultural expressions by choosing literature exclusively from a white, traditional canon. Explorations of racial identity and social justice caused one

teacher candidate to realize that she was "political" and that this was not necessarily dichotomous from her ability to "love children" by building "a community of respect." An elementary education teacher candidate developed an expanded concept of what it means to be a teacher and how it is actually valid and appropriate to bring in perspectives that may not necessarily part of the standard curriculum but offer a multicultural dimension to the curriculum.

Although most students in this group moved beyond blaming themselves for institutional conditions of racism, 6 of the students openly wrote about their sense of *shame or guilt* for their whiteness and appeared somewhat stuck as to how to move beyond this state. For example, in order to complete these assignments, one woman wrote exclusively in the third person in order to provide herself with an increased perspective to talk about racialized issues in her life:

> Before becoming a teacher, she plans to read about how other whites have dealt with their feelings of non-association to what she viewed was the predominately white sense of superiority and [of] guilt how they moved past those feelings toward an acceptance of themselves.

Curiously, 2 of the students who wrote openly about what they perceived as the futility teacher identity assignments and considered them as irrelevant to their becoming teachers, eventually went on to critique their racial identities. One preservice teacher seemed to capture part of the dilemma that other students had expressed in seminars and workshops in trying to reconcile the concept of privilege with hardships encountered in life: "Being white gave [my German ancestors] privileges, but this does mean life was always easy." Another expressed his dissatisfaction with the historical foundations that led up to the racial identity assignment: "We need to put a stop to the bullshit and focus on our progress, our goal, our growth. The past is past." After curricular interventions, he was able to admit his initial frustration, "yet as I've learned

through reading Beverly Daniel Tatum's psychological explanation of racial identity, 'in the absence of dissonance, certain dimensions of identity escape conscious attention.'" Looking back at his past experiences, he was able to conclude, "The fact that I had no attachment or immediate interest in exploring my ethnicity reiterates the power of being white in a predominately white society" and came to see himself as a teacher who "will have the perfect opportunity to offer my students alternatives to mainstream racial perspectives."

7 of this group of students articulated the importance of having a *supportive learning community* as a safe and constructive space for an exploration of personal and professional racial topics related to their identity formation. The majority of the students in the cohort were, as one student stated, used to "independent learning, but had come to value working in groups" as a result of the program. One teacher candidate saw her cohort members "as fresh adherents to a constructive awareness of our individual racial identities [who] must help one another work through these various stages" in a journey to attain Helm's status of autonomy.[1] Another found a structured learning community as a "useful [place] to have a peer group to share such experiences and ideas with as a motivation for future growth."

6% (n = 3), all white women, expressed abstract *colorblind* concepts that helped them to avoid questioning their own social positions. One portrayed a rainbow of races coming together and then claimed "that is what my racial identity means to me." Another referred to European ancestors and explained that her sense of "determination for success in my life...makes me think of the role of genetics in determining who I am today." The third one expressed confusion over her European-mixed heritage and contended that she prefers to identify with an Ecuadorian family whom she knows.

The other 14% of the sample (n = 6) avoided addressing any issues related to their racial identity as related to their teacher identity formation. The primary reason was an overt *denial* of the relevancy of the relationship between one's identity formation as a teacher and one's racial identity. Two of those students, both white males, eventually left the program by the end of the second quarter with one expressing open hostility at the process:

> Re: Helms and Howard: both of these clowns insist on dividing people, categorizing entire "races" and making broad generalizations which I find offensive, outmoded, and ridiculous. Re: "white identity," I do not have one, nor do I wish to develop one. I am not interested in slotting my life into some boxes made by Howard, which I suppose makes me either racist or an "ignorant white," but so be it. I know who I am and how I feel and it is neither of those.

Two of the students of color expressed divergent opinions on the value of racial identity and social justice explorations. At one end of the spectrum a woman of color appreciated how the program handled the "revealing of white privilege in a way that didn't offend others....It was good to see others realize the privilege they have." Curricular activities gave her "the opportunity to develop skills to stop prejudiced behaviors and attitudes in the education field." A male of color, however, was initially uncomfortable with the process:

> For a person who has been forced to deal with racial identity since his early youth, it can be incredibly frustrating to sit in a room full of adults who are realizing their own racial identity for the first time.

Nevertheless, this same student did make important connections for himself, especially through Tatum's (1999) chapter devoted to "Identity Development in Multiracial Families," as he had "grown to recognize my bicultural identity and am quite proud of it."

**Findings Part II: Reflecting on a Year of Identity Exploration**

A second data source of analysis were written reflections at the conclusion of the first year of our two-year graduate-level teacher preparation program that compared students current perspectives to their application essays to the program as described earlier. 40 students completed the first year and 100% were positively impacted by their autobiographical research in making connections to being culturally responsive teachers. 77.5% observed significant changes in their perceptions of what it means to be a teacher in a culturally diverse society. A common realization was captured by a male elementary education teacher candidate as he reflected upon his identity formation journey: "I failed to realize that individuals have to look inside themselves to find their own racial identity and where they are positioned in society before they can take the responsibility of nurturing another human being." He now "cringe[s] at the dominant Anglo practices that I embraced as normal, just, and accepted throughout the years." Continuing, he reflected on his original sense of presumed neutrality and noted,

> How wrong I was and how arrogant of me to think I was prepared to put myself in front of a classroom with an unbiased attitude. What I have developed this year in terms of racial identity and advocating for the individual goes far beyond the classroom.

This common refrain among the students blurred the boundaries between the classroom and the larger society and between individual teacher actions and personal responsibilities outside of the school walls. An art major concluded, "More importantly, I see how I am learning and applying the values I've developed around social justice in every aspect of my life." One female student commented on how over the course of an academic year, she and her cohort were able to move their autobiographical research to a better understanding of the influence of societal biases on schools:

> I have shifted from merely looking at my own upbringing to delving into the biases of U.S. society in general. I was clueless about the monstrosity of racism and biases that occur in classrooms. I have also become aware of how much of a challenge it is going to be to teach in schools that are so ingrained with biases.

Students continued to cite their movement from an additive to *transformative perspective* in their views of teaching and learning. An elementary education teacher candidate, commenting on the additive approach she previously held, wrote, "I had not realized how narrow this scope was. Now I am going toward 'transformative,' and nothing will ever be the same. Thank goodness for my students!" A woman with 10 years of teaching experience in a private school originally saw herself "just jumping through a hoop to satisfy a state mandate" to be a certified teacher and had been satisfied with her additive approach to multicultural education. She concluded, however, that by "studying my own identity and my white privilege, I was able to realize that the way I had been on was not correct" and now considers it an "injustice to my students of color by not dropping the mask of my white privilege" as part of her identity shift to a transformationist. Most students, as an elementary education teacher candidate put it, "had never equated 'white' with 'privilege.'" A male science teacher candidate observed that a transformative approach can be constructive because "there are many issues in geology and science that affect people of color and low socio-economic status." A secondary education student stated, "I better understand how multiculturalism is not simply an 'add on' approach to include minority and minority culture, but a perspective to teach from."

Colorblindness was recognized by another student has a shortcoming in forming a transformative teacher identity formation: "At the beginning of the year, I would have been one who said, 'I don't see color.' I have become aware...that I not only see and react to color, but to poverty, to discipline problems, to the handicapped." Students who had held onto colorblind conceptions of equality through the first part of this study made a significant shift by the end of the year. A math and science middle school

teacher candidate in that small group (see "Findings Part I") had her previous sense of meritocracy challenged and stated,

> Perhaps most challenging for me thus far has been to recognize that I am where I am today because of white privilege....I have realized that my school experience was sugarcoated and promoted a pretty picture of White America; I will provide my students with varying perspectives and strive to teach them the value of recognizing everyone's assets and contributions to the school community.

The woman who used a Heinz 57 analogy to describe her ethnicity and never discussed who own racial identity formation was eventually able to acknowledge that "I am a white woman from a lower-middle class family – that title gives me privilege....I am an individual with a history and so will my students be."

22.5% (n = 9) of the teacher education students contended that their current understanding of their teacher identity status remained congruent with their perspectives prior to entering the program. These were students who, prior to entering the program, had internalized a commitment to social justice. An English preservice teacher in this group explained in regards to the "multicultural and anti-bias ideals" with which she entered the program:

> What is different about my perspective in all of these areas is that I have vocabulary, in-depth understanding, and the ability to tap into professional on each topic....However, I have become convinced that problems in the public school system run much deeper than I previously believed.

Most of the students in this category and in the entire sample could point to pedagogical skills that they had gained that supported their evolving teacher identities, like the teacher candidate who stated that she was "amazed" at how her multicultural understandings had remained unchanged but noted, "However, I have been provided with tools for dealing with 'isms' in the classroom."

None of the students inferred that the task of being a culturally responsive teacher is a matter of acquiring cookbook-like techniques as they may once believed. A

female education student stated, "I can humbly admit...that true and effective anti-biased transformative teaching is not easy [but instead] complex." Overall, students felt a sense of confidence to move forward in a culturally responsive manner. One teacher candidate admitted,

> As little as a four months ago I felt inhibited by my lack of experience to contemplate racism to the degree that we have in this program. Now, at the end of the first year, I feel quite empowered and confident to live up to my values and the fight for social justice.

Most of the responses that elicited pedagogical actions that can be taken were broad realizations as to how they actually had techniques and approaches that can have transformative outcomes. The following paragraphs are intended to provide a range of responses that reflect the pedagogical empowerment teacher candidates felt by the end of the academic year

Creating a *democratic classroom environment* was understood as foundational for culturally responsive teaching. One teacher candidate found the curriculum's inclusion of "ideas of setting up social contracts and having weekly meetings" that was reinforced by a workshop on "democratic classrooms has given me a means for addressing the many issues that can and will be a part of my daily life in the classroom." This same student understood her teacher role to include "raising awareness" within her school of racist practices and policies while supporting "the call for democratic, socially just practices." A realization for preservice teachers, as stated by one woman, was a concrete understanding that "there are approaches to teaching that can influence how a classroom can be a place for equality and respect...where all can feel safe and empowered."

A social studies teacher education student had "fears going into teaching that I would spend the whole time lecturing in front of the students," the primary pedagogy

he had observed through his own K-12 schooling. Instead, he stated that he has "gained confidence in my ability to use democratic pedagogy in the classroom" by applying methodologies "that lead to student-initiated learning" and incorporate adolescent perspective of his student population. With this goal in my mind a female science and mathematics teacher candidate wrote that she had acquired skills in creating *heterogeneous, cooperative learning* that can help her "achieve my stated goal of encouraging children in learning math and science...[and] I now want to specifically promote the learning of girls and minority students." For another secondary education student, cooperative learning was a possible means to counter "the insidious effects of tracking on educational equal opportunity."

*Curriculum development* was understood as a critical link to creating an equity pedagogy. An elementary education preservice teacher wrote,

> Building curriculum is my opportunity to create an academic environment that is conducive to learning with respect to the perspectives and experiences of my students. This is a concrete way in which I plan to approach my teaching with a multicultural outlook.

The importance of a *knowledge of students* for whom a teacher is responsible surfaced in connection to the curriculum design process. One female secondary teacher wrote how her new knowledge base in racism and anti-racist strategies "is indeed a viable part of being a culturally responsive teacher....I will be better able to build on students' existing knowledge and set clear, attainable expectations according to diverse sets of student capabilities." This knowledge was also applicable to a science education student who is "more aware of the need to understand how these outside influences can affect a student's success in class, their interests, and their view of school as a whole." Imbedded in these reflections was a new sensibility as to how *teacher expectations* can influence learning opportunities. An elementary education preservice

teacher captured this perspective when she stated, "I have been able to see how teacher expectations affect academic achievement, and that teachers generally have low expectations for historically marginalized groups."

The *courage* to be culturally responsive can be inhibited by personal fear of operating within a transformative paradigm. The autobiographical research into teacher identities that can make meaningful connections with culturally responsive teachers did affect a white student who questioned whether she was capable of continuing in the program because she experienced emotional problems associated with this curricular intervention. She stated, "I realize now that there exists no space free of bias," a realization that troubled her previously held idealized notion of what it might take to create a caring classroom environment. In her final draft of her autobiographical research, she wrote in regards to the identity exploration process, "I am considering taking the time that I need to address personal issues before completing my student teaching, so that I when I do enter the classroom, it is as strong, secure woman who models the love of learning." This particular student, who was in academic good standing in the program, deeply interrogated all expected aspects of her autobiographical research, but the turmoil that developed within herself was apparently not adequately resolved. Contrasting this stance was another female student who acknowledged, "My fear is that I will make mistakes, someone will get hurt, and I will not even be aware of what I have done. A challenge for me now is to face this fear." She continued to write that the program had given her "the courage to walk the path and do the work necessary to create a classroom where all students can learn."

A supportive *teacher education learning community* that encourages preservice teachers to act culturally responsive was again referenced by students. A student, who

had been among the small group in the first part of this study who appeared to cling to colorblind conceptions, wrote, "I see now the importance of a learning community to help build and solidify peer relationships, and I realize that they have the potential to break down racial barriers that may exist." A student who transferred from another teacher education program that he noted for its "complete lack of a multicultural focus" found that "seminars have been the key to my successful experience thus far." Participation in a learning community helped one teacher candidate value the opportunity for *collaboration* with colleagues. In wanting to move beyond her original notion of a teacher always having to act alone, this student noted,

> I also want to collaborate with other teachers, students, parents, and the community for the mutual benefit of all....I especially realize the importance of collaboration, as well as modeling my beliefs, ideals, and my process of grappling with, confronting, and evaluating my own biases and search for social justice in education and our democracy.

Within the program's learning community were workshops that also helped students find collaborative links from, for example, professional educators as *role models* who presented extensive perspectives on closing the academic achievement gap. One young man commented on this experience:

> Sometimes I feel very alone in my beliefs or think that the task ahead of me is too difficult. So to sit and listen to people older than me who have made a career out of narrowing the achievement gap left me quite optimistic about my goals.

In closing this aspect of the analysis, it is worth including a response of a student who was notable in this study for going beyond the expectations of the autobiographic research goals. This science teacher candidate and identified practices that she considered "critical" and that "resonate with my personal values":

> 1. The examination of the school and classroom power structures, and the concomitant shift towards student empowerment via choice and student-centered activity and exploration.
> 2. The tailoring of pedagogies to particular students groups, or at the very least, creating curricula that values a wide range of ways of knowing and learning.

3. The clarification of expectations and maintenance of an interesting, but consistent classroom.
4. The implementation of transformative multicultural education that reforms both instructional methods (pedagogy) and content. Teaching in this way must not withhold information and must be oriented towards encouragement of socio-political action.

This preservice teacher was exceptional in being able to move her identity formation process to a more systematic analysis of a critical pedagogy that is now based on her goal to be a culturally responsive teacher.

## Discussion and Conclusion

My working hypothesis for this project, as stated earlier in this paper, was that curricular interventions as described in combination with an extended autobiographical research project into teacher identity formation will (a) deepen a teacher candidate's realization of the importance of transformative multicultural education in teaching and learning and (b) help move a candidate toward an anti-racist teacher identity. The results of this study confirm this hypothesis. Both parts of the hypothesis were realized for all of the teacher candidates by the end of an academic year. Students embraced the importance of transformation and came to understand the latter was impossible without an identity shift that incorporated anti-racist, culturally responsive teaching practices. The importance of closing the achievement gap, however, was only overtly noted by one student. This may have been a function of terminology because students consistently referred to their responsibility as teachers for the learning of all students regardless of their backgrounds and abilities. The final element of the working hypothesis focused on teacher candidates being able to sort out the conflicting socio-political messages they receive about their students and schooling. This was confirmed by students who became aware of how they had been historically socialized into dominant cultural perspectives where a certain invisibility of underside of U.S. social

policy has promoted privilege over equity and human rights. A veil of social history knowledge had been lifted for these students so that they could begin to see the possibility of transformative agency.

To approach the anticipated goals of this project would not have been possible without teacher candidates having *extended time* in a supportive learning community to investigate and revisit topics related to their teacher identity formation in comparison to their racial identities and concepts of social justice. The first of the three quarters in this program revealed that most students had moved to an important level of awareness, an understanding that was still disconnected from culturally responsive teaching practices. It took nearly two more quarters of academic work combined with weekly field experiences in public school classrooms for these preservice teachers to acquire the dispositions and knowledge base that can help them be culturally responsive teachers. A team of faculty willing to prioritize this project was an important variable in providing the necessity of extended time for student investigation, reflection, and writing.

Personally for the students the curricular approach in this study succeeded with *no labeling* of them. Although definitions of racism, racist, and institutional racism were discussed, finger pointing at individual teacher candidates was never part of program processes. When students would express shock or shame at revelations of the underbelly of U.S. history and white privilege in and out of schools, my standard response would be "Why should you know this?" My point was that dominant forces have successfully tried to bury this knowledge in favor of a feel-good version of history that clearly misrepresents both the oppression, struggles, and accomplishments of people of color and low-income populations.

The autobiographical research process was left to each student to pursue according to syllabus due dates. As I explained to these preservice teachers, "You can not fail identity formation." By this statement I was attempting to convey that they would *not be evaluated negatively* for interrogating their respective histories and ideologies that they had brought into the program. To "fail" could only result from not attempting the assignments. This approach likely contributed to education students writing honestly and candidly and not being concerned about having the "right" answer for a professor.

The study appears to support the appropriateness for a teacher education program to go into *depth on historical and social foundational* issues from a multicultural perspective while not having to sacrifice skill building in curriculum development and instructional strategies. Without a knowledge of the socio-political context of schooling, autobiographical research into teacher identity formation is likely to be an idle exercise unrelated to the racialized realities of public schooling. Without pedagogical skill building that is compatible with culturally responsive teaching, new understandings about oneself as a teacher can remain too abstract for a preservice to act on.

Previous research confirms that waiting until the full-time student teaching phase of a program is too late to begin to instill in teacher candidates a multicultural commitment to culturally responsive teaching (see Vavrus, 2002). This has been confirmed by the rich multicultural conversations faculty have been able to have with these teacher candidates – who are currently in the midst of completing full-time student teacher internships – about their pedagogical approaches and the engagement and earning of all their students. The multicultural education work for teacher education programs should be initiated in the early stages of a program and maintained throughout a teacher candidate's preparation years. This task requires thoughtful

collaboration among teacher education faculty and a willingness to restructure the curriculum to create a multicultural thread throughout a program that permits the explorations of a teacher's identity formation. The results, as this study suggests, can be future teachers who are on the path to becoming culturally responsive teachers.

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**Note**

[1] A short-hand for "autonomy" is "Informed positive socioracial-group commitment, use of internal standards for self-definition, capacity to relinquish the privileges of racism. Person tries to avoid life options that require participation in racial oppression" (Helms & Cook, 1999, p. 91).

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