



UNDERSTANDING POVERTY THROUGH RACE DIALOGUES IN TEACHER PREPARATION

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Abstract

This study used critical dialogue within a teacher preparation program to address the dilemma of preparing pre service teachers for educational arenas in which they will interface with students who are socially and economically disadvantaged. Using Critical Race Theory as a lens, the study addressed the following research questions: What were the candidates' responses to the experience of engaging in a day of dialogues designed in part to explore how economic disparity is promoted through institutional racism? Were any of the participants' assumptions challenged? Did the dialogue change candidates' thinking about how they might engage future students in learning?

Keywords: *Critical Race Theory, poverty, pre-service, teachers*

Introduction

Teacher education programs committed to social justice are designed to prepare candidates to work with the increasingly diverse students they will be encountering in Pre-K-12 classrooms. In the small private university setting in Oregon, where this study took place, Glenda and Anita, two teacher educators, were particularly concerned with how to engage pre service teachers in a dialogue designed to help them understand and deconstruct what it means to be a minority or disadvantaged student in America. In Oregon, almost 1 in 4 children live in poverty. Minority groups face the highest rates of poverty in the state. Broken down by ethnicity, 9.2% of Asians, 29.8% of Native Americans, 29.8% of Latinos(as), 29.7% of African Americans, and 36.2% of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders live in poverty compared to 14.8% of Whites (Oregon Center for Public Policy, 2011). The disparities in poverty by race continue to widen, as the recent recession disproportionately affected communities of color. In addition, the disparities found in Oregon are mirrored through the United States, which makes this study relevant for pre service teachers and teacher educators throughout the country who are committed to social justice education.

The purpose of this dialogical research project within a teacher preparation program was to address the dilemma of preparing pre service teachers for educational arenas in which they will interface with students who are socially and economically disadvantaged. The following describes the outcomes of a collaboration between Anita (biracial) and Glenda (Caucasian) that involved using a three-part film series on race in combination with a diversity study circles (DSC)

framework (Moss, 2008) to help raise awareness amongst majority White teacher candidates preparing to work in schools comprised of increasingly diverse student populations. Larry, a teacher educator and Critical Race Theorist, joined the project two years later to lead in the CRT analysis of the data.

The context for the study was an 18 month cohort based teacher preparation program designed for individuals who were working full-time, or had other commitments during the day, and studying towards licensure two nights a week and occasional Saturdays. The activity took place early into the candidates' first semester during Learning Communities, a series of three two-credit courses—*Learning Community I: Personal awareness*, *Learning Community II: Meeting the needs of diverse student populations*, and *Learning Community III: Emerging as a professional practitioner*—that candidates take during each semester of the program. These courses create space for candidates to explore personal identity, culture, diversity, and reflection on practice within a learning community and experiential approach.

In the study we addressed the following research questions: What were the candidates' responses to the experience of engaging in a day of dialogues designed in part to explore how economic disparity is promoted through institutional racism? Were any of the participants' assumptions challenged? Did the dialogue change candidates' thinking about how they might engage future students in learning?

This paper reports on the outcomes of two sets of data collected with different cohorts during the Power, Privilege, and Difference segment of the Learning Communities I course. Aggregated over the two-year implementation period, the composition of the pre service teachers included: 24 White; 3 Asian; and 3 Latino/a ranging in ages from their early 20s through 40s. Thirteen students were male and 17 female, 2 of whom also self-identified as LGBT. Two local Latina teachers (female) joined our class for one event. One African American educator (female) joined our class for the other. Ensuring the presence of educators of color was a critical component to engaging pre-service White teachers to become conscious of their whiteness and how that whiteness is defined by privilege. Glenda, Caucasian (female), also played a critical role of reassuring students that the films were not designed to make White people feel guilty. Her presence as co-facilitator helped the White students to not feel immediate resistance due to skin color that Anita, as a bi-racial educator, had experienced in previous courses whilst exploring issues of power, privilege and difference with her White students.

Critical Race Theory as a Story Backdrop

When we framed our study, we wanted to establish a lens that would support the need for pre service educators to become more conscious of their culture and the social culture around them. In addition, we wanted pre service teachers to embrace culture as a living entity; one that is necessary to experience and make part of their daily lives rather than viewing culture as simply a 3-hour course they once took. The mentality to answer how to engage others from different cultures hinges on the idea that in order for one to do, one must know, and for one to know, one must have experienced. We wanted pre service educators to have authentic experience versus simulated ones due to a large amount of information that is lost when the experience is simulated. For these reasons, Critical Race Theory satisfied our inquiry into how to engage pre service teaches in race conversations, which have been ongoing in the United States since the birth of the nation.

As the height of civil rights movement peaked (during the late 1960's), scholars, activist, and political figures searched for new methods where they could continue articulating and contesting the appalling social, political, and economic treatment of African Americans. Delgado (1995) noted that previously successful legal tactics had become increasingly unsuccessful, thus a number of interdisciplinary advocates met to resolve the occurrence of failing arguments. Outcomes of this collaboration gave birth to the framework currently known as Critical Race Theory (CRT), which is the first descendant of Critical Legal Studies (Delgado & Stafancic, 2001). The goal of CRT is to protest inequality and its condition and treatment of oppressed people by arming the voices of the oppressed and establishing that racism is ordinary and serves as a powerful determinant in how individuals are situated and treated. This "tool," CRT postulates that darker skin equals different and/or inferior status and treatment (Sleeter & Delago-Bernali, 2004; Delgado 1995; Parker, 2000; Delgado & Stafancic, 2001; Crenshaw, 1988; Dixon & Rousseau, 2006; Matsudo, 1996; & Solorzano, 1989).

Parker (2000) asserts that CRT is grounded in six tenets, which are maintained as deconstructive tools to dismantle fundamental mainstream concepts of raced people. Delgado and Stafancic (2001) echo the voices of scholars (Matsuda, 1996, Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Bell, 1987; & Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995) through the summation of CRT's tenets of: (1) racism realism, (2) interest convergence, (3) social construction thesis, (4) differential racialization, (5) intersectionality, and (6) voice-of-color. The following expounding of the tenets serves as Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) synthesis of many CRT writers' understanding of the tenets:

1. **Racial realism.** Racism is ordinary, not an aberration; racism is the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country. This means that racism is difficult to cure or address. Color-blind, or "formal" conceptions of equality, expressed in rules that insist only on treatment that is the same across the board, can remedy only the most blatant forms of discrimination that stand out and attract our attention.
2. **The phenomenon of interest convergence (or material determinism).** Most CRT theorists would agree that white-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes, both psychologically and materially. Because racism advances the interests of both White elites (materially) and working-class people (psychologically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it.
3. **The "social construction" thesis.** Race and races are products of social thought and relationship. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient. People with common origins share certain physical traits such as skin color, physique, and hair texture. But these traits are extremely small when comparing what human beings have in common. The small amount of difference has nothing to do with personality, intelligence, and moral behavior. That society frequently chooses to ignore these scientific facts, creates races, and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics are of great interest to critical race theory.
4. **Differential racialization.** Critical writers in law, as well as social science, have drawn attention to the ways the dominant society racializes (uses different minority groups at different times, in response to shifting needs) populations for their benefit in such areas as the labor market. At one period, for example, society may have little use

- for Blacks, but much need for Mexican or Japanese agricultural workers. As needs change over time, popular images and stereotypes of various minority groups shift as well. In one era, a group of color may be depicted as happy-go-lucky, simple-minded, and content to serve White folks. A little later, when conditions change, that very same group may appear in cartoons, movies, and other cultural scripts as menacing, brutish, and out of control, requiring close monitoring and repression.
5. **The idea of intersectionality.** Each race has its own origins and ever evolving history. No person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity. A White feminist may be Jewish, or working-class, or a single mother. An African American activist may be gay or lesbian. A Latino may be a Democrat, a Republican, or even a Black. Everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances.
 6. **The voice-of-color.** The voice-of-color thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, Black, Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their White counter-parts matters that the Whites are unlikely to know. Minority status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism.

According to Bell (1980), collectively the tenets articulate the inferior treatment based on race as an everyday occurrence, yet they provide solace and direction to understanding oppressive institutions, while offering critical, constructive and creative frames to examine and develop resolutions. The inequitable realities are the critical foundations that compel CRT writers to adopt a form of oppositional scholarship.

It is within this design that Ladson-Billings and Tate (1994) are credited with introducing CRT to the field of education. Donner (2003) explains that CRT, as an investigative lens, offers a theoretical framework that challenges popular notions and discourses in education through rich and deep deconstruction of racist policies and procedures. Additionally, Sleeter and Delgado-Bernal (2004) argue that race is examined ahead of other physical characters because Eurocentric values and morals place a higher acceptability on race than other factors used to marginalize a person. These scholars (Bell, 1987; Crenshaw, 1988, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; & Parker, 2000) and their scholarship use CRT to reject the dominant discourse of implicit Eurocentrism and naïveté in regards to embedded power relations in education. Instead, the aforementioned scholars use CRT to assist in the eradication of oppressive devices in education, thus making a more equitable experience for all. Through careful awareness training, CRT may assist educators in the elimination of racial and other forms of oppression. CRT and its central tenets offer the foundational lens to investigate race in concert with culture. The tenets are the basis for such an examination, which analyzes racial oppression and cultural misinformation as potential factors in creating oppressive education. Although CRT may contain limitations, it does provide a compelling tool to examine oppression in education.

Setting the Context for Learning through Documentary and Dialogue

As a first step to cultivating personal awareness in our candidates, Anita and Glenda held a full-day workshop at Glenda's home to view and respond to a three-part film series, *Race: The Power of An Illusion*, a provocative documentary including: *The Difference Between Us*; *The Story We Tell*; and *The House We Live In*, a set of three videos that challenges our assumptions about race and looks at the "underlying social, economic, and political conditions that dispropor-

tionately channel advantages and opportunities to white people” (http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-about.htm). Through these films, candidates broached important and challenging issues such as the social construction of race, the pervasiveness of systemic racism, the history of American public policies and social practices, and how those policies and practices advantaged the families of many of the students in the room and disadvantaged minority groups to create the wealth gap and a lack of opportunities.

We introduced race dialogues as an experiential learning piece to afford pre service teachers the opportunity to gain knowledge and sensitivity about themselves through dialogues about race as a social construction. We assumed that White pre service teachers would not begin the workshop with knowledge of their privilege. We were cautious to the sensitive nature of engaging pre service teachers in exploring their personal identities. In practice, the full day’s event with our students involved using a diversity study circles (DSC) framework – an approach designed to foster dialogue on race with the goal of critical self-reflection in response to interfacing with diverse multicultural experiences (Moss, 2008) – in conjunction with the PBS documentary series.

The format of the day’s event included alternating between the three films and critical dialogue. A discussion after each film provided an opportunity for participants to share responses, talk about thoughts or feelings that came up during the viewing, and contribute personal experiences. We took field notes and participated by sharing our personal experiences and facilitating the open dialogue to ensure everyone had a chance to talk. We stressed the role of listening for understanding (Burbules, 1993; Isaac, 1993; Jenlink & Carr, 1996) as a key to building a learning community. Discussion continued through a shared lunch hour and informally at the end of the all-day workshop.

We analyzed the data through the lens of poverty within a CRT framework and our own experiences in the project. This paper presents our critical stories of experience and an analysis of pre service teachers’ reflections’ on the third film, *The House We Live In*, for evidence of awareness of issues of poverty tied to historical and current racism. The third film, *The House We Live In*, showed how housing loans after World War II advantaged White people to become home-owners, and zoning laws further worked to the advantage of White people gaining home equity while people of color were disadvantaged. Today, wealth among White people is eight times more than accrued wealth among African Americans. These were hard ideas for White students to face. Glenda, Caucasian, played a critical role of reassuring the candidates that the films were not designed to make White people feel guilty but rather to help them to understand how Whites reached a point of economic disparity in the United States.

Researcher’s Critical Stories of Experience

As we analyzed pre service teachers’ reflections on the films, we discussed how we were impacted by the project. We found this to be a powerful experience and decided to present our critical stories of experience with education and poverty before presenting our analysis of pre service teachers’ reflections on the race film, *The House We Live In*.

Anita’s Story

Participating in this research has reminded me how privileged my life circumstances have been. Frontline’s 2012 episode on social issues highlighted some harsh truths about American

society: the nation's poorest children come from households headed by a single mother, nearly 47.6 percent, and Black children are more likely to live in poverty than children of any other race, at 38.2 percent. I am a person of color who was raised by a single mother, but I was fortunate to have never lived in poverty.

I was raised by a driven, determined woman of Jamaican heritage who—robbed of her dreams of higher education when taken out of school to help support her family—was determined that her child would have every opportunity to get an education and succeed in life. When I was a baby, she studied to put herself through nursing school. During my childhood she worked as a hairdresser by day and cigarette girl in a club at night until she was eventually able to open up her own hair salon. When we moved to Canada in the 1970s, she worked her way up through the organizational ranks, from the residential to the commercial division, to become the first Black female commercial real estate agent in Toronto (a highly male-dominated profession at the time) and, subsequently, the top earner for several years in her firm. My mother describes herself as a woman lacking in formal education: I see a successful woman who has spent a lifetime breaking down barriers.

My career path didn't start out in education; however, as I came to realize that I wanted to help make a difference in people's lives, my heart and mind eventually led me to it. In my 17 years as a minority educator, I have taught in predominantly White institutions. As such, my students have been accustomed to seeing themselves over-represented in their teaching faculty. In fact, for many of them I have been their first teacher of color. Growing up, I had a different experience to that of my students. I recall having one Black South African teacher throughout all my K through higher education schooling. I had her for one year in middle school, for one course, and yet to this day I still remember and appreciate the positive influence she had upon me.

For many minority students today, the reality is that it is highly unlikely they will see themselves reflected in their teachers. So, as a teacher educator, one of my goals has been to prepare candidates to meet, as best they can, the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. At times, it has been challenging to lead and encourage my White students to openly and critically engage issues of power, privilege, and difference with me. The first year that Glenda and I held this workshop, the difference was palpable. Glenda brought a level of conviction and life experience that added a rich dimension to the dialogue. The White candidates appeared much more responsive to discussing these issues with a co-facilitator in the room who looked like them. They were also more openly curious about my experiences as a person of color. It was at this point that I recognized we had tapped into something that was potentially transformative.

I feel that our work is just beginning and acknowledge that this pursuit requires challenging not only my students to move out of their comfort zone, but myself as well. Moving forward, I hope that we can find creative ways to provide authentic inter-cultural exchanges that will enrich our experiences and lead us to think more deeply about our role as social justice advocates for our marginalized youth.

Glenda's Story

Understanding education and poverty has been a moving target for me. I grew up in a family of eight children during the fifties and sixties. My dad was 35 and my mom was 28 when they married and had eight children in eight years. My dad attended public schools in a one-room school house in a rural community in Louisiana until he completed grade eight. He joined the navy at age 17 to keep from starving during the depression. When WWII broke out, he reenlisted

and served for 10 years. He later attended a monastery to become a Jesuit. I am a little fuzzy on his goal. I think he hoped to maybe teach, but I am not sure. All I know is that he was guided out of the order before he could make his final vows. He was encouraged to marry and have a family, which he did.

Our family of seven moved to Texas in October of 1952, when I was nearly three. In September after I turned five in December 1955, my youngest sibling was born. I had five younger brothers and sisters, and my mom had to go to work full-time to make ends meet. We never missed a meal and could always have a snack at night if we were still hungry after an early supper. We were crowded in a less than 1,400 square foot house. Eventually I became conscious of social and economic disparity when I was about eight years old.

Earnestine, who was African American, came to our home each day while my mom worked. She cleaned the house, did laundry, and served as our childcare provider. We referred to her as our maid. She also had babies like my mom. I remember going with my mom to visit Earnestine and bring her family a meal when she had her sixth baby. It was during one of these visits to her house, which was smaller than ours, that I began to wonder who took care of her children while she worked the same hours as my mom. I knew she was only paid \$22 a week, probably a fourth of what my mom earned at the time. I often felt conflicted as a teenager, feeling like we were poor in comparison to many other children, yet knowing we had so much more than most. I do not think that I can really understand true poverty.

I worked every summer in high school and all through community college and senior college to successfully pay for four years of higher education. I was then awarded a teacher assistantship to teach two sections of American history and complete graduate work in American history. It was more than enough to meet living expenses and pay a note on a new car. I came under the illusion that anyone in America could make it into middle class if they just worked for it. That was the line that I preached each day that I taught poor African American middle school students in East Texas during the late eighties and nineties.

It was not until I began to read critical scholarship in 1998 in a doctoral program that I began to look at my experiences differently. I began to realize that when I earned college money in high school, African Americans were not being hired as servers in restaurants. I do not remember African Americans eating in the restaurants where I worked. After all, we had separate water fountains during my elementary years. Even though I had truly believed that my students could become anything they wanted, in reality, most did not find very many supportive White teachers or as diverse opportunities to get ahead.

After completing a doctorate in 2001, I transitioned to higher education to prepare classroom teachers in Indiana. During the eight years I was in that position, I only had 10 African American pre service teachers; and only two were male. When I moved to Oregon, where I worked with Anita, I saw a distinct separation between the affluence that supported the pre service teachers at our private university and the disadvantaged local community citizens who were primarily Latino/a.

In my current position in Texas, I see poverty across ethnicities. The majority of the pre service teachers are Latina. Many of our students are moms, trying to juggle family and education in the midst of poverty. I have two White male students on welfare. One is a single parent, and the other is married with one child. The one married with a child recognizes that living in his grandfather's house provides him an advantage over his African American neighbors who struggle with paying rent or a mortgage note. For the first time in my career in higher education, I have the opportunity to work with a diverse population of students who can engage in open dia-

logue concerning issues of poverty, race, gender, culture and language. I have grown to be very conscious of the economic privilege I experienced by being born White and growing up in a White dominated community. I continue to learn about the obstacles that poverty puts in front of people from my pre service teachers.

Larry's Story

Given my 20 years of teaching, I have learned that knowing the essence of culture is a vital aspect of working with students and their families. In addition, I have learned and most importantly experienced the effect of poverty on a family and a student's educational outcome. During my life of experiences there have been many instances where I was situated in poverty. Here I want to share two such instances with you to assist in providing insight into how I have come to understand poverty and how it has been constructed in my life as social and economic poverty.

Born in the Mississippi delta to a family of generational poverty offered me my introduction to poverty. Even though I was two when we moved from Mississippi to Chicago (following the race charged murder of my dad), I weave between my experiences in these two places to capture my worldview. In Chicago, I lived in the Robert Taylor Projects along with a number of families who had migrated north. Later, I will give more details about our struggle to get into the Projects and life there. According to my mom, it was for better educational and economic opportunities. It seemed to me like everyone in the Projects was from Mississippi. Even though Chicago was now home, every year until I was fourteen, I spent my summers with my granddad in Greenville, Mississippi. Most folks in Greenville knew me as Peggy's boy, giving continuity to my life in Chicago, where everyone in the Projects seemed to know each other from Greenville.

Because of my long summer visits with Granddad, I recall living in impoverished conditions of the rural south even though I was in Chicago from September through mid-June every year. Granddad's home was a structure without running water. I remember during summer-visits having to transport water to and from the house. My granddad's house was actually two houses pulled together to form a larger structure. There weren't any designated rooms, but my family partitioned the space in order to make appropriate living quarters. We had to go outside to get water prior to heating the water to do laundry or take a bath. The tin "tub" served for both functions. I last saw the structure when I was a young adult. At that time the house had begun to collapse into itself due to rotting wood.

In addition, I remember the outhouse being my least favorite place to go, especially at night. It was a dark and frightening place with several mysterious and daunting sounds. Furthermore as outhouses are concerned, this one was seemingly a mile of darkness away from the house. It was in these conditions that my mom, four siblings, and I lived along with my grandparents and two of their sixteen children lived during the summers of my formative years. I remember chickens running in the front yard, a few pigs and especially the large pecan tree that stood in the front yard. Later, I learned my family depended on those items for food. These incidents formed my early views social poverty.

It was in the early 1970's, when my dad was killed, that my family began to think about a move. I was two. My mom learned that the Social Security Act of 1935 (which was part of President Roosevelt's New Deal) allowed African American women to participate in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. That began my lesson in economic poverty.

With this new “opportunity” my family engaged in the great northern migration of African Americans.

We initially moved to Milwaukee but almost immediately moved to Chicago. I don’t really have any memories of living in Milwaukee. My mom tells me we struggled initially due to her age. A rule of AFDC at that time was one had to be an adult of twenty-one years in order to receive the service. Since my mom was only nineteen and no longer lived with her parents, we were not eligible for AFDC. It wasn’t until my mom encountered an old friend from Mississippi that she was able to get the aid we so desperately needed. During this time, my mom recalls receiving a voucher for furniture, food, clothing, and utilities. In addition, social services granted us a rent deposit and first month’s rent. At this point, we moved into Chicago’s Robert Taylor Projects, where we became part of a perpetual revolving institution of economic poverty.

In the Projects we were subjected to violence, and most opportunities for upward and outward mobility eluded us for many years. As a young adolescent, I recall having to shop at thrift stores for clothing and grocers, all while barely obtaining life’s other necessities (i.e., soap, laundry powder, towels, and deodorant) to assume a regular existence. The institutionalized cycle of poverty surrounding the projects was supported by the social service agencies, the public schools, the medical building, and the Bronzeville Shopping Mall. At first glance one might imagine a sight of convenience; however, an unintended consequence of this action perpetuated and reinforced economic trapping and deprivation.

The second example I want to share begins with my mom telling me a story from her childhood. This story bears similarities to events I experienced. She recalls seeing neighbors with bags of fruit, containers of water, and sacks of nuts. As she inquired of my grandmother what they were and how they obtained them, my grandmother replied, “From the fields.” My mom wanted to know more and soon began to insist that she wanted to go to the field. She recalls, “Every day we wanted to go to the fields; that’s all we could dream about. We really wanted to go out to the field.” One day my grandmother reluctantly agreed. However, she knew my mom would not like it and also knew my mom was not aware of the context of “going to the field”. Once my mom was at the field, she maintains, it was torture...pick/chop cotton; clean houses, cleaning under the house, planting flowers, pulling weeds, killing and cleaning chickens and fish to name a few of the tasks associated with “going to the field”. Needless to say, my mom quickly abandoned the desire to go to the field.

Fast forward to my experience of social poverty, it was after my seventh grade year. I was proud to be of age to work in the city’s summer youth program. I begged my mom for a full year to register me. I knew I could do it; and besides, I would then have money to buy nicer clothes, shoes, and more importantly a cool Trapper Keeper. Mom and I got to the local registration hall and registered. It was an agonizing two weeks to learn if I was chosen as a recipient to work in the program. When the news finally came, I was beside myself to learn I had in fact been chosen for the summer youth work program and could report back to the registration hall for a work assignment. I did not give any thought as to what I would have to do; instead I focused on my dream of having nice clothes, shoes, and the cool Trapper Keeper. I was assigned to a maintenance detail at an area high school. Waxing floors, cleaning walls, steaming shower rooms and lockers, cleaning the chemistry labs, transporting trash, degreasing the boilers, cataloging books, erecting chalkboards and maps, and cleaning and resurfacing desks, was not what I had in mind. My job assignment reminded me of my mom’s story—that of wanting and longing for vertical access and not seeing the pitfall of horizontal attainment. Socially, the city perceived manual labor as the only labor I was good for. My perception was influenced by later learning that

while participating in a study conducted by faculty from the University of Chicago, there had been White students around my age who were assigned desk jobs or jobs in the bank and even one at the university. I was not pleased by this news and wanted to know how that happened; now I know I should have wanted to know why.

These personal accounts have been a large part of my poverty framework and continue to leave a lingering reminder of just how brutal circumstances can be. My experiences allow me to have empathy and compassion when working with pre service educators who may not have had experiences with poverty. My lived experiences allow me to be credible and authentic with students who may not have any exposure to impoverished situations.

Critical Narrative Analysis of Pre Service Teachers' Reflections on Experience

Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the backdrop, we provide our narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) utilizing responses from the pre service teacher participants. Under careful and repeated analysis, we articulate how students found it difficult to establish a framework that was outside of their native frameworks concerning poverty. Although the pre service teacher participants identified underpinnings of poverty, they did not allude to any strategic understanding of how poverty intersects with race, gender, ethnicity, and the like. Meaning, they were not able to engage in empathy for the plight of individuals who have been systematically discriminated against through the thoughtful usage of social and political policies.

Many pre service teacher participants, however, indicated the information they were exposed to through the film series was in fact novel. One pre service teacher participant suggested, while at Glenda's house,

I learned that members of a race cannot be identified by blood group, skin color, or genes. From that class, I realized that race has nothing to do with these physical characters. From the movies, I felt that I should be color blind to all kinds of students first before I start my teaching. It used to be very easy for me to tell which "race" students are from by looking at their appearances. But I could not tell which nationalities they are from. To students who have similar skin color with me, I will feel familiar. It used to make me feel that we are from the same race. But now I know that I cannot have that kind of feeling any more. In my teaching, I will eliminate such bias and stereotypes to my students with different skin colors. What I need to do is try my best to help them to have a better life.

Although this pre service teacher participant claims a desire to eliminate flawed thinking and become more aware of impoverishing actions, it is not certain that the pre service teacher participant has the skills to make any substantive change in actions.

Furthermore, this pre service teacher participant interpreted the race video as authorization to become "more color blind" when interacting with students. CRT would point to the fact that those who are in a position of privilege would not want to see the individual's color, thus to not acknowledge their lived histories. How can an individual consciously ignore the fact that Larry is Black and has a history-like most Blacks, a history that is cloaked in race based sub-standard treatment and on-going social, educational, and political deprivation. Particularly, choosing not to see Larry as a Black man relegates him to a status of invisibility rather than a status of transparency. If Larry is transparent, one would look at him and see that he is Black and

remember the history he represents. This form of critical epistemology could assist pre service teachers in organizing and arranging a socially just interaction with PreK-12 students and families who are living in poverty.

To the contrary, the next pre service teacher addresses the role of race and indirectly positions race as a basis for inferior treatment. The next student deeply contemplates his role as a history teacher. Although we did not follow this secondary social studies teacher into the classroom, perhaps this student's consciousness will result in action in the classroom. The pre service teacher offers the following remarks:

The movies that we watched today were an interesting refresher on the inhumanities that humans continue to inflict on each other because of differences in their skin color. The idea that much of the formal discipline of science as it is practiced in the US arose from attempts to prove the inferiority of blacks is a powerful and sobering piece of knowledge. Although many of these "scientific" endeavors made their way rapidly (and rightly) enough to the realm of superstition and racist circular reasoning, simply the fact that much of the field arose from such poisoned roots should be enough to encourage us to be aware of the roots of all our disciplines. History, for example, I have heard described as "written by the victors." In the case of US textbooks, media reports, etc., this is obviously the case much of the time-- subjectivity is the rule rather than the exception.

For many of the pre service teacher participants, the race films explored a fashion of life that evoked complex feelings. Another pre service teacher participant explains the experience in the following manner:

The videos also revealed to me the practice of "redlining" in the mortgage industry, an especially interesting thing to listen to after I reviewed two articles about housing and mortgage availability to minorities vs. whites. This concept underlies a larger issue: the institutionalization of racist, sexist, and otherwise discriminatory policies. We must be aware of their existence, and even if we cannot change them ourselves, must keep in mind how they may be affecting our students—how the notion of race, even if irrelevant genetically, is still very much a pertinent construct from a social standpoint.

Many pre service teacher participants' responses, like this pre service teacher, could very easily be analyzed and transcribed as feelings of guilt. For example,

For me, the rest of the afternoon was spent in a little quiet reflection and I didn't really want to contribute more. I journaled, "I think, by then we were all feeling angry and guilty because of our past heritage of violence towards other peoples, and our present feelings that we realized we still need to change." The whole experience was interesting, thought provoking, and sometimes sad when I thought of how much my nation as well as the American nation has victimized others, and pillaged their lands.

Like many pre service teacher participants, instead of punishing themselves, the pre service teachers could work on creating an awareness which would recognize that they could play a tremendous role in readdressing discriminatory policies and practices, beginning with curriculum and instructional practices in schools that seek equity for all students.

After acknowledging the existence of discriminative practices, this pre service teacher reverted to tacit, reflexive thinking that secures a privileged status by suggesting that learning about impoverishing and discriminative tactics could be reduced to “a few pages of an interesting article.” The pre service declared,

I felt a little frustrated sitting and watching videos for three hours, like the time could have been better used in other ways. The content was interesting, but not that rich; what took them three hours to say could have been written about in a few pages of an interesting article.

It is difficult to analyze such comments because our own biases and extended knowledge of the students interferes. The student’s focus on the critique that the article could have been much shorter and to the point did not give us much insight into his/her perspective on the critical issue of poverty. Similarly, the student did not share with us what would have been a better way to use Saturday’s time. It sounds like the day’s activities did not meet the student’s needs.

Under the guidance of CRT, this pre service teacher’s comment reflects the ongoing view of interest convergence. Here this pre service teacher clearly understands that racism and poverty discriminative practices, however, illustrates an unconscious interest in maintaining poverty so to continue advancing the agenda of privilege. This form of psychological trapping only serves a deviant outcome; individuals who knowingly or unknowingly engage in white-over-color practices will target actions that are designed to advance status quo agendas over providing liberated justice. In addition, this privileged position will be employed to assure the maintenance of control over resources and materials. Thus, players become married to a cyclical pattern where one group is privileged and the other group is impoverished.

During our analysis we discovered that there was room for improvement in the lives of the pre service teacher participants. Armed with this knowledge, we faced the dilemma of how to offer the information, how should that information be administered, and, most important, would the experiences be authentic or simulated. We drew this conclusion after coding this pre service teacher participant’s account of the workshop experience.

Although everyone in our class seemed to agree that the basis for racism was outrageous, it was surprising to realize how many racist tendencies each of us has. One cohort member made a comment about how we can include “them” in our classroom activities, but Glenda would not allow this student to finish their thought. She pointed out the student’s unconscious habit of using the word “them” to reference a racial or ethnic or whatever type of group of people different than their own. I do hope the student did not take offense at Glenda’s comments because I do not believe that was her intent. Plus, her comments really helped our class to think about the language we use without thought every day.

CRT asserts that individuals use privilege to make comments in regards to those they discriminate against, with complete disregard of any consequence. Although the cohort member may have inadvertently used the term “them” multiple times, without Glenda’s presence of mind to create a teachable moment, this cohort student and other pre service teacher participants may have reinforced their privileged position and continued to subject individuals from diverse populations to discriminative policies. This pre service teacher participant went on to say,

One final thing that stood out to me was learning about the immense struggles non-white people went through in our country, even as early as a few decades ago. I had no idea that African-Americans were not able to legally purchase homes until fairly recently, or that I was raised with privileges like speaking English. I always assumed that my life is the way it is because of the hard work I do every day, but that is certainly not representative of the whole picture. Even access to resources like the Internet and other job advancement opportunities are not accessible to everyone, no matter their ethnicity. I assumed that everyone knows how to access information on the Internet, how to get loans for college, or how to do anything they want. But this just isn't reality...[this is] mind boggling but it makes me grateful for what I have and makes me want to help others discover their resources.

This reflects the on-going maintenance of privilege and access to resources and materials. CRT asserts that individuals with privilege will nearly do anything to keep that privilege. By the very nature of this phenomenon, the eradication of poverty cannot be entrusted to the individual; instead social and political policy must be investigated and transformed in efforts to restrict the impact of privilege, while discouraging disenfranchising practices.

Final Reflection

While collaborating on this project regarding poverty, we came to recognize that we may be unintentionally taking part in the vicious cycle of the privileged and the oppressed. In addition, we grew in awareness to the fact that as we read, studied, and worked towards equality, we were (and still are) simultaneously working against it. Glenda brought to light that as we investigate the lives of those that are negatively affected by poverty, whether through social, political, or educational policies, we ultimately benefit from their stories. For example, our project is built upon the continued economic disparity in society, and we receive a kind of academic capital by presenting a paper at AERA and possibly eventually publishing an article. This will undoubtedly advance our career paths as a side product. We would like to think that we are engaged in social action by developing pre-service teachers to be aware of inequities and to take action to provide an equitable education to all students.

What now happens to the individuals whose stories of poverty formed the basis of our critical agendas? What becomes of their position in society? After becoming conscious of this thought, we began to question our motivation. What brought us to this critical project?

In analyzing our worldviews, collectively we share sympathy for the individuals who have not had the opportunity to advance in society as we have. Additionally, we recognize that merely having sympathy does not provide the means to enhance or enrich the lives of others. Again, we reflect upon our worldviews and attempt to ascertain if our project constitutes action. Our collaboration assisted our understanding of each other's motivation and further commitment to creating and providing an equitable environment where we can further transform with our pre service teachers, such that together we can bring about equity in PreK-12 classrooms.

Given the analysis of the pre service teacher participants' responses, we see evidence that action needs to occur. As we move forward with this knowledge, we have to create innovative methods and strategies to make social justice a part of our pre service teachers' everyday experience. Furthermore, the experiences need to be framed in such a way that our pre service teachers

are comfortable with stepping outside of themselves in order to provide social justice without the fear or guilt of being victimized.

If we could guide our pre service teachers to examine phenomenon such as poverty under a critical lens, coupled with a social justice frame, education could prove to be a powerful equalizer of the privileged and oppressed. We believe that pre service teachers want to have empathy and compassion, and we want to increase their awareness of the destructive policies, practices, and patterns to which students and their families are subjected. We imagine if a pre service teacher could know how their actions or lack of actions could demoralize a student's future, their conscience would compel them to move towards action that would provide equality in the available materials and resources. At the conclusion of this work, we would hope we are assisting our pre services teacher with gaining this level of awareness so they will go forth and support all students in the learning process.

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