Examining Discourses of an Aspiring Teacher of Color in the Figured World of Schooling

By Mary Louise Gomez

Many scholars have advocated for the recruitment and induction of greater numbers of teachers of color into the profession (Gay, Dingus, & Jackson, 2003; Gomez, Rodriguez, & Agosto, 2008a, 2008b; Hollins & Torres Guzman, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1997; National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004). Currently, only 14.6% of the teaching force in the United States are Latino/a or African American while students of color comprise nearly 41 per cent of all public school students (National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004). The Center for American Progress (Bireda & Chait, 2011) reports that in over 40 % of U. S. rural, urban, or suburban public schools, there are no teachers of color. Furthermore, in schools where the majority of students are those of color and living in homes with high levels of poverty, teachers remain predominantly White (Bireda & Chait, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Across the United States, many students of color do not have teacher role models who mirror their own race or who share their cultural understandings of how the world works and what their place might be in it (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

I have been concerned with the recruitment, enrollment, and retention of teachers of color nationally and

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at State University (all names of persons, places, and institutions have been given pseudonyms) where I serve as chair of elementary education (Gomez, 2010; Gomez & Rodriguez, 2011). So, I was intrigued by the experiences that students of color were having in a course I devised for aspiring teachers (those not yet admitted to a teacher education program). I began teaching this course, featuring the intersections of race, class, gender, social class, sexual orientation, and language background in fall 2011, and have taught it to groups of mostly freshmen and sophomores each semester since that time. To date, 167 undergraduates have enrolled in Critical Aspects of Teaching, Schooling, and Education. Of these students, 146 have been White, 16 have been students of color, and five have been international students. I especially was interested in exploring the life experiences, thinking, and discourses of students of color as they are an under-represented group on this campus and in the teaching profession as well.

Mandi Williams, a 21-year old aspiring teacher, was one of the most articulate and engaged students enrolled in the course in the spring of 2012 (and one of three students of color enrolled that term). Because she expressed understandings about teaching that were both like and unlike those of many of her White, female peers, I especially was intrigued by conversations with her. As Mandi stated (to me) early in the course, "I always am wondering why White women forever say they want to be teachers because they love children. I think they confine who they love to certain children, who look like them, and not like me." Mandi frequently identified her concerns for how social justice might be implemented in schools, and how its enactment might affect students of color and those living in poverty. I understand her concerns for social justice as "fair and just structural arrangements and personal/social/professional relationships that provide access, opportunity, and inclusion of historically marginalized or otherwise oppressed individuals and/or groups of people" (Brantmeier, 2011, p. 432). However, Mandi also told stories of her own siblings' oppositional behaviors in school such as refusing to turn in assigned homework or conform to behavior standards and their subsequent punishment with school suspensions and low grades. She seemed to be having an internal debate about what worked in supporting students' learning and achievement: Did the answers lie in implementation of social justice pedagogy or perhaps in students' conformity to explicit school rules and teachers' tacit beliefs about how a "good" student behaves?

Mandi was a very successful student, one who surpassed her five siblings in achievement in K-12 schools, and easily won a place at State University at high school graduation. Mandi grew up in a home where she experienced poverty, her siblings' substance abuse, domestic violence between her parents, her father's alcoholism, and his occasional incarceration. She also experienced her mother's fierce support of all of her children. However, this support was not always recognized as support by school personnel, but was seen as excusing her children's often not positive behaviors. I was impressed by Mandi's resilience, and intrigued by ways

she initially thought about and talked about children from homes like her own. These were drawn from both deficit discourses and also those of education for social justice. Based on the above, I ask:

> What understandings did one aspiring teacher of color bring to the course and how did she respond to the intersectional dimensions of race, class, gender, language background, and sexual orientation discussed during the course?

> How did the course confirm or disrupt discourses that this student was confronting? And, what ideas did she encounter that became internally persuasive ones for her?

Conceptual Framework

I draw on Holland and her colleagues' (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998) concept of culturally figured worlds to explore how schooling is structured and how Mandi Williams and her sisters experienced it differently. Holland et. al. (1998) describe a figured world as "peopled by characters from collective imaginings" by participants "who grant shape to the coproduction of activities, discourses, performances, and artifacts" (p. 51). They also explain, "By 'figured world,' we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (p. 52).

Within such figured worlds as those that Holland and her colleagues investigated, such as college campus romance, Alcoholics Anonymous, and mental illness, people enact their identities (self-understandings that are formed through interactions with social and cultural materials at hand) figuratively/narratively and positionally/relationally. Figuratively or narratively, figured worlds provide contexts for people's actions and their own and others' understandings of who they are via the "stories, acts, and characters that make the world a cultural world" (Holland et. al., 1998, p. 127). Each is a simplified world populated by a set of agents for example, in the world of romance attractive women, boyfriends, lovers, fiancés, who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state. These can include flirting with, falling in love with, being "dumped," having sex with one another as moved by a specific set of forces such as attractiveness, love, or lust. Positionally/relationally, people daily perform these understandings of themselves within realms of power, status, deference to others, hierarchy, and affiliation. As Holland et. al. (1998) explain, relational identities are those that persons imagine themselves having relative to those of others (p. 127).

Individuals may participate in several figured worlds simultaneously, and also may over time, critique the figured worlds in which they participate. For example, women engaging in a figured world of campus romance may opt out of such en-

counters, may reconsider who supposedly desirable romantic partners are, or may find some intermediate space in which to negotiate their value as attractive and intelligent women. Options for participation in figured worlds are available variously as cultures and groups permit these to be enacted. One of the most ubiquitous and enveloping figured worlds in the United States is schooling, which nearly all children encounter in formal public or private institutions.

In this article, I explore the figured world of schools, which like the worlds that Holland and her colleagues researched, has particular explicit as well as tacit rules for participants' behavior. In schools, such rules concern what constitutes a good student, someone who is compliant with school rules; how she enacts that role, for example, turning in assignments on time and being quiet until invited to speak; what artifacts she uses to show her investments in school, practicing and playing instruments in the school band, or playing on sports teams; and how she is rewarded for her behaviors, with high grades or prizes for comportment or varsity letters.

In particular, I explore the figured world in which Mandi and her siblings were schooled and what identities they developed over time and across occasions. Focusing on Mandi's and her sisters' differing experiences helps illuminate the complexity of ways that schooling works. This especially is true for people like Mandi who straddle multiple worlds, as both an insider and an outsider in the academy.

To help me understand Mandi's experiences and thinking about her identity and identities of other students of color within the figured world of schooling, I turn to Russian philosopher M. M. Bakhtin's (1895-1975) theorizing of discourse practices or the ways in which persons speak to and respond to one another. He grounded his ideas about language and its use in notions of the utterance and also dialogism or the ways in which we produce meaning from the historical time, social context, particular topics under discussion, and the conversants present at any moment (Vice, 1997). Bakhtin (1986) posited that turn-taking in our interactions with one another is characterized by a change in speakers whereby each responds to previous interactions in an ongoing chain of dialogue.

> Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies upon the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account. Therefore, each kind of utterance is filled with various kinds of responsive reactions to other utterances of the given sphere of speech communication. (p. 91)

Utterances take place in particular social settings in which we interact and are embedded within the multiple social languages each person speaks. These are comprised of, but not limited to the social dialects in which we are imbued and include professional jargon, languages spoken by differing age groups, the language of various authorities, languages that are in fashion, etc. These are fluid and ever changing (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 262-263). Individuals speak multiple, often conflicting "languages" and must choose from among these when addressing others or themselves. Bakhtin believed that out of conflict between various social languages and the contexts in which they

are spoken comes learning. In other words, every individual requires challenges to his existing patterns of talk and thought in order to learn.

Bakhtin (1981) asserted that within each person, there are two types of discourse in constant tension with one another. The first is authoritative discourse or that which we assume to be "true" either because it has been passed down through time as traditional knowledge, is asserted through available science, or governs our thinking through religious, political, or economic doctrine. A second type of discourse is internally persuasive and consists of those arguments that each person considers convincing for herself.

> … the internally persuasive word is half ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consists precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words… It is … developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. (p. 346)

That is, internally persuasive discourses constantly are changing as we learn and develop as people, and as we encounter differing viewpoints.

Such struggles between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses can occur around every dimension of teaching and learning in the figured world of schooling, including rules governing how schooling is enacted, how particular characters such as students of color are viewed, and how rewards or punishments are allocated. Because most of my students aspired to be teachers, I was interested in how and if they were responding to ideas I was presenting about the intersectional nature of persons' identities. I wanted to understand what internally persuasive discourses students were constructing around particular dimensions of people and how they were doing so. I also recognized that I needed to take into account the contexts in which students were living and studying, including the city in which the university was located, the school district where they were volunteering, and the campus on which they were learning. These discourses seem especially important to attend to today as the figured world of schooling immerses teachers in local and national contexts in which assessment of themselves and their students are privileged above all else (Costigan & Crocco, 2010). I assert that just as important is taking into account what aspiring teachers' discourse practices are concerning diverse populations of students, that we need to interrogate how they are critically understanding, elaborating, and/or interrupting these discourses.

Context

This research is located in nested settings of Lake City, a community with a population of approximately 250,000 and its surrounding communities, the public schools of these communities; and State University, a large, primarily White institution (PWI) located in Lake City. In many ways, Lake City mirrors the nation with a growing population of people of color. For example, in the year 2000, 84% of the Lake City population was White, but 10 years later, Whites had dropped to

75 % of the population (U.S. Census Data, 2000, 2010). Likewise, Lake City elementary schools now enroll nearly 50% students of color whereas 20 years ago (in 1991-92), 80% of Lake City elementary students were White (Lake City Schools, 2009-2010). In addition to greater numbers of students of color, Lake City schools experienced a 500% increase in English language learners in the past two decades, most of whom are Spanish speakers (Lake City Schools, 2008).

Lake City high school graduation and suspension rates also reflect national trends with regard for race. U. S. graduation rates for Latinos/as, African Americans, and Native Americans are 56%, 54%, and 51% respectively (Education Week, 2010). In 2012, graduation rates in Lake City were 56% for Latinos/as, 48% for African Americans (Lake City Schools, 2012), and 71.4% for Native Americans as contrasted with an 87% graduation rate for Whites (Department of Public Instruction, 2013). Suspension rates for students of color in Lake City also are alarming with African Americans eight times more likely to be suspended than their White peers and four times more likely to be suspended than their Latino/a peers, calculated across all grade levels in 2010-2011 (Lake City Schools, 2012).

There are four large comprehensive high schools in Lake City, one in each quadrant of the city. East Lake City High, which Mandi attended for three years, is located in an area originally housing working-class people who lived near the factories where they worked. In 2008-2009, the year she graduated from East Lake High, the school enrolled 1700 pupils, 51% of whom were White, 26% were African American, 11% were Latino, and 11% were Asian. That year, 49% of the students at East Lake High were classified as coming from low-income families. Additionally, 20% of students were enrolled in special education, and 14% were English language learners (Lake City Schools, 2008).

State University enrolls 28,737 undergraduates, 22, 870 of whom are White and 4,152 of whom are persons of color with others named as international students (State University Data Digest, 2011-2012). State has a history of racial tension that continues in contemporary times. For example, in 2012 a Black Spiderman doll was displayed hanging from a balcony during a large party on fraternity row, symbolizing lynchings of African-American people in the past. Also, at another fraternity party, White students reportedly yelled racial slurs and threw glass containers at two African-American women walking nearby. Additionally, a conservative group critical of racial preferences for college admissions held a press conference in Lake City in September 2011, alleging the university engaged in discriminatory admissions practices favoring African Americans and Latinos/as. Their report caused students and faculty on both sides of this debate to rally and passionately contest one another's viewpoints (Finkelmeyer, 2011). These incidents have created polarized factions of students, as those of color often feel targeted by discriminatory discourses and actions by Whites. Likewise, White students often feel that students of color have advantages in admission to the university overall, access to majors in desired fields, hiring for campus jobs, and enrollment in targeted programs providing support for

learning. This charged racial context of campus, community, and school district is the backdrop for Mandi's experiences at school and on campus.

Methodology

Data Generation and Collection

A total of 58 students, 14 of them students of color, from four semesters of the course participated in two-hour life history interviews at course completion. I chose life history interviews for data gathering because I recognized that what beginning university students brought to the course largely relied on their family and K-12 schooling, as well as media and social experiences prior to entering higher education. Like Mishler (1999), I have found that in talking about their lives, participants frequently illustrate points they wish to make in storied form (see Gomez, 2010; Gomez & Rodriquez, 2011) and that these stories enable them to talk about their experiences and how they understand them. Additionally, Cole and Knowles (2001) emphasize the connection between one's life and the context/s in which it is lived, saying that life history research "…is about understanding the relationship, the complex interaction, between life and context, self, and place" (p. 11).

I hoped to understand how Mandi was developing internally persuasive discourses from interactions among these varied sources and was understanding how the figured worlds of school are enacted. I encouraged all aspiring teachers' questioning of assertions made by authors we read, guest speakers, and myself rather than simply accepting what others' wrote or said. I also required readings that offered varied viewpoints on social issues. Further, I held several class debates in which students had the opportunity to craft arguments about various issues, such as the dispute over the teaching of ethnic studies courses to secondary school students in Tucson, Arizona as depicted in the film *Precious Knowledge* (2011).

At the end of the course each semester, I (with some graduate student research assistants) conducted interviews in a place of the participants' choice, often a quiet conference room in the building where our class was held. Interviews were semi-structured and covered experiences in aspiring teachers' earlier lives such as their K-12 schooling experiences, their family lives, their friendship groups, the perspectives of their families about diverse people, their course experiences, and their experiences in 25 required hours of service learning, often conducted by tutoring. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. After submitting grades, I also retrospectively collected artifacts such as papers and journal entries that my students had posted to the course website. I also kept a journal throughout the course, noting conversations I had with various students and interactions I observed among the students enrolled. I was careful to conceal students' identities, offering pseudonyms for them and their families, locations of their home communities, and names of schools they had attended prior to matriculation at State.

I chose this student as a case study (Stake, 1978) of how one aspiring teacher

of color viewed the world and her place in it (Morris, 1994). She is a student from a low-income family who grew up in or near the community where State University is located. I chose to interview Mandi because she seemed positioned to understand the dilemmas that many families from marginalized racial and economic groups face in schooling. For example, instead of learning about how poverty and discrimination affects families' health and well being from articles, lectures, and film clips, I imagined her as readily comprehending the material effects of racism and economic hardship. Mandi did indeed understand these predicaments. However, as I narrate below, she also embodied competing discourses of both social justice and deficit discourses regarding who is responsible for one's school failure and how one might overcome the negative perspectives of teachers, coaches, or administrators concerning persons of color.

Stake (1978) reminds us that, in case studies, "…typicality and representativeness yield to needs for assurance that the target case is properly described" (p. 7). So, while I argue that this aspiring teacher represents dimensions of what many researchers see as needed in U. S. schools, whether one sees her as "typical" of a particular group is not as significant as my careful description of what she brought to and took from the course, and of the contradictions she began to locate in various discourses colliding within her.

I understand that while I have amassed a great deal of data from interviews and related artifacts collected, that it is not possible to capture all of an individual's life even when she is a young adult. I do not portray the entire life of a participant, as this is impossible to collect in a two-hour interview, even when such interviews were conducted on multiple occasions. I did try to capture salient events that led Mandi to her present understandings (Viernes Turner, 2007) and the competing discourses with which she struggled over time.

Data Analysis

I drew on both inductive and deductive methods of analysis (Graue & Walsh, 1998). I began inductively by reading the interview transcripts on multiple occasions, noting patterns within and across interviews. Examples of inductive themes from transcripts of the 14 participants of color are that people of color often are viewed as unfairly benefitting from special programs of support designed to retain them in college, that one's individual merit and hard work result in positive schooling outcomes for all students, and that people of color are seen as "stealing" places at the university from deserving Whites.

Analyses were deductive in that I read the data patterns against my professional and personal knowledge. I first read the data patterns against a research literature describing the experiences of students of color in university courses like mine featuring attention to race, class, gender, language background, sexual orientation, and context. I then reread the data patterns against my personal experiences growing up in a working-class family, as the daughter of a Latino parent whose first language

was Spanish and who learned English at school, as a "good" student who strived to achieve in school, and as a former classroom teacher. After rereading the data, I constructed narrative accounts that explored aspiring teachers' often contradictory and competing authoritative and internally persuasive discourses about how race, class, gender, language background, and sexual orientation affected their own, their family members', and friends' lives as well as how the figured worlds in which they were engrossed affected their experiences.

The Figured World of Mandi Williams' and Her Siblings' Schooling

Mandi Williams was a junior at State University when she enrolled in Critical Aspects of Teaching, Schooling, and Education in the spring semester of 2012. She explained in two, two-hour interviews (conducted in May 2012 and in May 2013) that she had grown up in Lake City and its surrounding smaller communities with her parents and 5 siblings. Mandi said that she had moved five times in the course of her K-12 schooling, explaining that her parents frequently relocated seeking lower rental apartments and safer neighborhoods for their children. Mandi articulated her childhood experiences as difficult.

> I grew up in a dysfunctional family. My father is an alcoholic and was incarcerated several times during my childhood and teenage years. There was a lot of violence, domestic violence at my house. My older and younger sisters were hospitalized and sent to detention facilities for alcohol and drug problems that began when they were in middle school. I coped with all this by studying really hard, doing my very best at school, and doing what my teachers wanted me to do. Everything was swirling around me, but I got my work done, played clarinet in the school band, participated in athletics, and was the best student I could be.

In the figured world of schools, students are expected to be quiet, do as they are asked without questioning, turn in homework at its due date, enthusiastically participate in clubs and sports activities, and be alert and responsive to teachers' directions. Teachers are expected to be prepared in their content area/s, deliver instruction clearly, grade assignments fairly and within allotted time frames, and conduct an orderly classroom. Parents play a role in the figured world of schools as well. Teachers expect parents to send children to school who are well behaved, well nourished, and appropriately dressed. Parents also are expected to bring snacks to school when asked, and to help out in classrooms. Parents are not expected to question teachers' actions or assignments, but it is assumed they will help their children do their homework in a timely manner. Mandi explained how her siblings and Mother interacted with school staff in one community where they lived for several years.

> In one school we went to, in Banford, it's a small almost all White community outside of Lake City, the teachers were always on my sisters about what they were

not doing or were doing (Mandi's emphases). My sisters did not always do what they were told to do. One time a teacher suspended one of them and my Mother went to the school when she found out and it was someone with no authority to suspend a student. They had not even told my Mother my sister was suspended; she had to find that out when my sister came home and told her. Another time my older sister was called "a n-----" [a racial epithet] and she reacted violently. She was suspended from school and nothing was done to the person who had called her by that word. My Mother was always going there [to the school]; she was an advocate for us. She always was defending my sisters. Once when one of my sisters was in fourth or fifth grade, her teacher made her go sit in a kindergarten class after the teacher became upset with her. She was so humiliated. My sisters were singled out and harassed for various behaviors. Kids from our neighborhood were treated more harshly.

Mandi named social class, race, and failure to conform to expected school behaviors as responsible for her sisters' difficulties in school. She saw her teachers as prejudiced, but also acknowledged that while her sisters were punished for failing to conform to school rules; she personally was rewarded for meeting teachers' high expectations. Such discourses around conformity to rules and its rewards created conflicts for Mandi. While acknowledging her sisters' failure to conform to school policies, she readily told me how she had benefitted from doing what was asked of her.

In my freshmen year at Banford, I played clarinet in the band, participated in athletics, and got all A's even in tough math courses that were not my favorites. I did what I was supposed to do. I never did that well again, even when we moved back to Lake City after my freshman year. I never got all A's again—I did well, but never all A's.

Mandi initially saw that her sisters' behavior problems partly were their own responsibility and that their race and low socioeconomic status also was a factor in how they were treated. She, however, elided these problems by her hard work and as she said, "perhaps by some luck, too." Regardless of what Mandi thought about her sisters' complicity in their own difficulties, she said that their Mother always was there to protect them as much as she could. She recognized her Mother as a strong advocate for her children. She could not volunteer in her daughters' classrooms as she worked two or sometimes three jobs, mostly waitressing, to pay the rent and feed her family. Mandi said that while her Mother's complaints often were rebuffed by schoolteachers and administrators, she always defended her daughters against officials' prejudicial behavior.

How the Course Began to Change Mandi's Thinking

Class discussions, reading of course materials, and tutoring at Jones Middle initiated changes in Mandi's thinking about why and how students of color and those from low-income families are differently treated from their more affluent

and White peers. She began to question an authoritative discourse claiming that students are responsible for their own school difficulties or successes. She began to wonder how many school staff members perceived students as deficient due to their race, ethnicity, social class or language background.

Her tutoring at Jones Middle School also helped her interrogate her beliefs about families living in poverty and students of color. Observing in classrooms during her tutoring, she saw how teachers ignored some students or were extremely vigilant about monitoring the behavior of others. These observations helped her because they were distanced from her immediate family and did not trigger all of the emotions that accompanied her siblings' school failures. Mandi said that in the eighth grade class in which she volunteered, her tutee continued to be "extremely disengaged" with reading.

> I noticed that the teacher doesn't pay attention to her. It could be only when I am in the room, but I feel like she ignores the fact that my student doesn't pay attention or seem engaged. From what I've observed, the rapport between student and teacher doesn't seem strong.

She continued, saying that,

> [In class], I began to see that my views were deficit views, just like some of my teachers in Banford and teachers at Jones Middle, too. I had internalized those ideas and saw students who were oppositional to school as being personally responsible for their behavior and teachers' responses to them. I saw most of the students who did not want to do their work or had problems in completing it as at fault for that. How could I have thought these things? These ideas make students responsible for bad things that happen to them at school.

Mandi began to see her own thinking about students of color as strongly influenced by her teachers' authoritative discourses about who is a "good student" and worthy of their attention and rewards.

She also cited reading McKenzie's and Scheurich's article (2004) concerning "equity traps" (uncritical habits of thinking and behavior by teachers and principals that hinder possibilities for creating equitable schools) as being instrumental in changing the ways that she thought. She credited the article for helping her consider how some school policies target students of color and contribute to their marginalization. She said she had formerly thought that treating all students equally was a good thing.

> … then I began to see that completely denies a piece of someone's identity. Now I see that students need to be treated differently; some need more help in completing their assignments and some need free lunch and some need their lessons repeated in a different way because they have difficulty learning.

In her reading of course articles and in her tutoring, Mandi began to see that some schools and teachers were targeting students for different sorts of education. She

cited reading Anyon's article "Social Class and School Knowledge" (1981) as helping her understand that schools and tracks within schools intentionally aim to prepare different students for different futures. Anyon's article illuminated the idea that some students were schooled to attend elite colleges, others for technical education, and that some students were prepared for work.

> This article helped me see that different schools were organized for serving different populations of students, some more affluent students received more of a critical thinking curriculum, and others, from less affluent families, were given a curriculum that prepared them for work and receiving orders. I had never thought that schools could actually prepare different people for different outcomes in life. That really affected me. All I could think about was, wow, this was pre-planned. It shocked me.

She began to see that her sisters' interactions with teachers, and their subsequent punishment for perceived misbehavior, could be related to more systemic issues than those related to their individual acts. The observations, interactions, and discourses she was encountering enabled her to create more internally persuasive ones than those she previously had encountered.

Mandi wrote in a final essay for the course that she had seen herself as a teacher who potentially would "solve" the problems of having disruptive students in the classroom, as they would see her as reflecting their own race. Further, she saw that she had transferred some of her thinking about her sisters' behaviors to students of color in general.

> Before this course, I had seen myself as a solution to a problem that I created. I believed that the only thing students of color needed was an instructor of color that they could relate to. I would volunteer in elementary schools [when I was in high school] when classes were filled with disruptive and disrespectful students of color. I had seen these problems as a racial issue and that the kids in these classes came from homes that were just as disruptive. I thought the reasons for the students' behavior was because the teacher, who was White, couldn't relate to them, and that their parents failed at childrearing. I felt that if there was a teacher of color leading the class, the children would behave differently. That couldn't be further from the truth. As a person of color, I, too, was at fault for falling into equity traps. After learning about them, I felt silly that I actually believed that teachers of color couldn't possess such deficit views.

She also was beginning to see how even when students of color from low-income families meet or exceed their teachers' expectations that they may not be favored with help from their teachers. Mandi reflected on her personal experiences in school and in her tutoring in a winter 2012 journal entry.

> I do not think that many of my teachers were invested in the students they taught. My guidance counselor at East Lake was not a large help to me in terms of support or encouragement to choose more challenging courses. Student emotional and academic supports were two resources that were lacking severely when I was in

attendance there. …Volunteering at Jones Middle School also has made me realize what I would do and not do as a teacher. I think I would place more emphasis on getting to know my students and establishing a relationship that fosters success.

In re-seeing her sisters and her tutees, she re-saw herself as well. She not only was a "good student" who always did what she was asked by authorities such as teachers, but also recognized that she often had to negotiate alone many aspects of school such as what college preparatory courses to take, what to expect from college, and how to finance her higher education. Her parents were unable to help her financially or draw from their own experiences of higher education. By the time she was applying to State, both were unable to work. Plus, neither had attended college so could not give her tips on where to apply or how to go about it. In a May 2013 interview, when asked what helped her persist in pursuit of higher education, she recalled that while "Teachers more or less approached me about my sisters rather than about me… My parents were as supportive as they could be. No, there were no teachers who took me under their wing or helped me."

Mandi had enrolled in a course on Racism in the United States her freshman year at State, and the experiences in Critical Aspects of Teaching, Schooling, and Education built on and expanded ideas she had read and talked about one year earlier. She now names her experiences and those of her sisters and tutees as what Feagin (2006) called "systemic or structural racism" (or the inherited unearned privilege, power, and money) that pervades our society. Her personal experiences also have led her to see that even the highest achieving students of color may be denied the support they need due to their race and social class.

Discussion

Over the course of the semester in which she was enrolled in my course, Mandi reconfigured notions of who she was and who her sisters were, and who was responsible for her sisters' (and her tutees') difficulties in school and in life. She began to see that they were not individual agents acting alone, but were actors in a complex intersecting drama that included their parents, teachers, school administrators, police officers, and other members of institutions that monitored who was "a good student" and who was "a failure." She began to interrogate the authoritative discourses with which she had been imbued and to take up more internally persuasive ones for her. These enabled her to view herself and her siblings in fresh light, as not individually responsible for their own fates, but as caught in complex webs of meanings that have been assigned collectively over time to what behaviors are seen as "good," correct, or worthy of recognition.

In their book, Holland et. al. (1998) articulate the importance of context for shaping what is possible in rethinking who we and those around us are and what we can do. Mandi cited her family members' continuing struggles with addiction and poverty as greatly impacting their lives as well as her own. The social contexts in

which she has lived created ongoing challenges for Mandi. She said, "Honestly, coming to class and having opportunities to think critically about all of these things is like a vacation for me [rather than thinking about my family's problems]." Regardless of her personal success in K-12 schools and at State, her sisters and their children continue to struggle. Holland et. al. (1998) emphasize that one can critique the local contexts in which our figured worlds operate, can open these to scrutiny by ourselves and others, and can develop alternatives to our own and others' thinking about such dilemmas.

> … identities and the acts attributed to them always are forming and re-forming in relation to historically specific contexts. They come to bear the marks of these contexts and their politics. Identity and their cultural resources … are constantly being generated, sometimes censored or suppressed. But, they are responses to, develop in, and so include the dilemmas set by the struggles, personal crises, and social recruitment under which they form. (p. 284)

Indeed, as a result of enrolling in Critical Aspects of Teaching, Schooling, and Education, Mandi was beginning to see how she might reimagine her own and her siblings' experiences with school in new political and social landscapes where race and social class might not define who one is and can be. Mandi's colliding social justice and deficit discourses also highlight how it is not simply a matter of educating more teachers of color for our diversely populated U. S. classrooms, but that these aspiring teachers also require opportunities to reflect on their identities and those of the students whom they will teach.

Conclusion and Implications

Holland et. al. (1998) argue there are two lessons to be learned about identities, that they are "formed and re-forming in relation to historically specific contexts" (p. 284) and that they "form on intimate and social landscapes through time" (p. 285). Thus, one always is responding to the social, political, and cultural forces in which we are immersed and out of such struggles, over long intervals, comes the development of our identity. This seems especially important to consider in contemporary times, when so much emphasis is placed on teachers' and students' performance on standardized measures.

In refiguring who she is and who other students of color living in poverty might be, Mandi began to imagine her future students as full of possibility as well as challenges. As she articulated, by "establishing relationships with students that foster success," she was picturing herself providing the discursive and material resources that were denied her and her sisters. With these words, Mandi was calling for new ways of thinking and talking about students like her sisters who required teachers willing to contemplate them through fresh eyes and images. She seemed to be trying to reconcile the tensions between the social justice discourses she had read about with discourses of deficiency that had framed her understandings of her siblings and other students of color living in poverty.

Holland et. al. (1998) point out that such work as re-envisioning one's students cannot be done alone, but always must be a "collective" endeavor. They write: "One can significantly reorient one's own behavior, and can even participate in the creation of new figured worlds and their possibilities for new selves, but one can engage in such play only as part of a collective" (p. 282). For me, this means that Mandi cannot act alone in doing such work, but that she will require like-minded colleagues who are actively and collectively engaged in working toward more equitable practices in schools. Together, teachers can make classroom spaces that honor students from all backgrounds and propel them towards school success. The following examples highlight how Mandi and other teachers might work together in such endeavors.

One promising idea comes from local teachers in a school district near Lake City who collectively work to consider which students in their classes might lack a strong "safety net." Together, they decide which adult in the building can mentor a particular student. The role of such mentors is not to "fix" students' problems, but to show them respect and empathy for the dilemmas they face, listen to them, and point them to where they can find needed information. This is a new set of discourse practices about students who are struggling in school, and demonstrates how alternatives to everyday and authoritative discourses can interrupt students' potential school failure. Having such a mentor might have provided Mandi or her sisters a (metaphorical) life preserver amidst the turbulence of their lives.

A second example of mentoring comes from another student enrolled in the course, 19-year old State University freshman Tish Roberts, who also conducted her service learning at Jones Middle School. Tish explained that she went to Jones on Wednesdays to tutor a 7th grader named Sandy in geography, one of many courses in which Sandy struggled. Tish chuckled when she said, "I truly was not great at geography myself, but what my tutee seemed to need as much as help in geography was someone to listen to her talk about her life." Sandy told Tish that her parents were divorced, her older brother had had multiple run-ins with police officers, and that her Mother was addicted to drugs. Over the semester, in talking about Sandy's concerns and about what they both liked to do, they bonded after discovering their love of movies. The film *Mean Girls* (2004) was a favorite of both young women, and they recalled loving the line, "We always wear pink on Wednesdays." Tish and Sandy decided both would wear pink every Wednesday when they met to study geography. At the end of the semester, Sandy asked Tish to return to meet with her in the fall, saying, "Maybe you could come to school and have lunch with me, and not study geography. You could be my mentor!" Tish was delighted, surprised, and a bit scared as she did not know exactly what being a mentor entailed. She spoke to the tutoring coordinator at Jones to see if this was possible and was given permission to be a formal mentor to Sandy. The coordinator and I both promised to be a sounding board for Tish—who plans to go and have lunch with Sandy once or twice a month and continue being an empathetic, respectful listener.

Both of these are examples of how mentoring with new internally persuasive discourses might be operationalized in schools. In the first example, teachers planned an endeavor to address what they saw as unmet needs among teenagers in their school, and committed to each help one student. In the second example, a tutor working within a group of peers and supported by their course instructor and a school tutoring coordinator was invited into mentoring by a student who found her to be just the support she needed. In both cases, the practicing and aspiring teachers committed to creating fresh ways of talking and thinking about students that were hopeful and positive, rather than ways of considering them that primarily saw students as damaged and responsible for their own failures.

Teacher educators can play a role in this as well by leading discussions with and creating possibilities for aspiring teachers to generate and enact equitable classroom practices. We can create opportunities for aspiring teachers to critically reflect on who they are and what their race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and language background means for their teaching and for their future students' learning from them. We can create possibilities for our students to examine the authoritative discourses with which they have been imbued and also to create internally persuasive ones to guide their identity development as future teachers. As Holland et. al. (1998) remind us,

> … it is [unlikely] that one's identities are ever settled, once and for all.…[they] remain dependent upon social relationships and material conditions. If these relations and social conditions change, they must be "answered" and old "answers" about who one is may be undone. (p. 189)

As teacher educators, we can create ways for our students to think beyond the narrow confines of dimensions we have been asked to consider about ourselves as well as those of children and youth. We can create possibilities for all aspiring teachers, despite the pressures of national and state accountability measures, to develop relationships with young people that foster imagining and re-imagining themselves and their students, for the potential benefit of all. It seems especially important to do so for aspiring teachers of color like Mandi, who may face many more challenges in their paths to teaching and mentoring youth than their majority peers.

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