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Recognizing All Students' Assets: The Role of Profound Interruptions

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Abstract: This text explores roles that radical empathy and profound interruptions play in altering prospective teachers' thinking and practices. Linking these concepts, I demonstrate how three teacher candidates drew on intersectional experiences in volunteer work, reading fiction and non-fiction, viewing films of "heroic" teachers, and personal writing to understand the assets and possibilities of diversely populated youth in the United States whom they are being educated to serve. Each prospective teacher's personal stories are coupled with insights gained from reading, film viewing, and interactions with students to showcase their development of fresh outlooks on low-income youth of color, contrasting those of many of their teachers.

Keywords: *Autobiography; Discourses; Empathy; Identity; Social Justice.*

Introduction

For over three decades, I have worked as a teacher educator at a large, public, Midwestern U.S. university. During that time, I have been puzzling about how best to educate new teachers so they might practice what Wilkerson (2020) and Givens (2021) recently have renamed radical empathy for all students. Radical empathy combines comprehension of students' experiences from their individual viewpoints and acting with care for them so that assets of all youth may be recognized. I also think about such behaviors as enacting principles of social justice.

Wilkerson (2020, p.386) explains the role of empathy in this process:

> Empathy is commonly viewed as putting yourself in someone else's shoes and imagining how you would feel. That could be seen as a start, but that is little more than role-playing and it is not enough in the ruptured world we live in.
>
> Radical empathy, on the other hand, means putting in the work to educate oneself and to listen with a humble heart to understand another's experience from their perspective, not as we imagine we would feel. Radical empathy is not about you and what you think you would do in a situation you have never been in and perhaps never will. It is the kindred connection from a place of deep knowing that opens your spirit to the pain of another as they perceive it.

And Givens (2021, p. 27) elaborates that empathy is not embodied in a moment or a single occasion, but "... can be seen as a series of processes: the ability to recognize emotions in others; being able to step into another person's emotional shoes; a response to the other person's emotional state." These intertwined processes are located within three sites: ourselves as fluid and changing persons; in temporal, geographical and historical contexts in which we live

and work; and in the cultures and community milieus in which we reside (Boler, 1999). Emotions, then, are constructed from our reciprocal interactions with others in time and space (Feldman Barrett, 2018).

And, Grant (2012, p. 914) argues that teaching for social justice also attends to the intellectual life of students, developing "flourishing lives" for all youth by "befriending their minds." He says three criteria must be met to befriend a mind: "… recognize the intellectual capacity of often marginalized students, provide curriculum content that is challenging and culturally responsive, and maintain ongoing reflective assessment of what they teach, how they teach, and why" (p. 915). Wedding concerns for both the intellectual and emotional well-being of all youth are those I intend to develop in my classes and address in this text.

In this paper, I explore the following questions: What promising practices and strategies have I found for preparing teachers who understand and act with care for all students (including those who differ from them in race, social class, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, language background, etc.)? What enduring lessons have I learned from these experiences?

Literature Review

I began examining how notions of social justice and empathy developed over time with cohort groups of students I educated over multiple semesters (Gomez, 1994; Gomez & Abt-Perkins, 1995; Gomez, 1996; Gomez, Walker, & Page, 2000). And a little over a decade ago, I began teaching an introductory course required for a certificate in education. It is aimed at students who hope to work in many varied helping professions, including teaching, and engages students in critically reflective thinking about their beliefs and behaviors. It features activities such as: reading novels of contemporary interest for young adolescents, viewing and critiquing popular films that focus on so-called "heroic' teachers, conducting volunteer work with children and teenagers in community centers and schools, and writing about one's own intersectional identity.

Throughout my teaching, a consistent focus has been the marked differences between the primarily white, monolingual university students enrolled on our Midwestern campus, and the increasingly diverse student populations they are being educated to serve. Most enrolled recognize they differ in many dimensions from youth with whom they work, but very often attribute those differences to personal and family deficiencies in the youth. University students also frequently lack strategies for ways to develop understandings of and care for youth they previously may have disdained. The class addresses these twin concerns: understanding youth motivations and experiences, and tactics for sharing interest and concern for students. I interviewed those enrolled in the course to discover its possible effects on their thinking and actions.

Rather than fault the individual university students for their perspectives and actions, I have tried to understand the contexts from which they originate, and how they have come to embody certain discourse practices. I began to see how often they were located among different, but synchronous discourse groups that Russian philosopher Mikhail

Bakhtin (1981) called authoritative as they are traditional ones passed down from generation to generation—what Bakhtin referred to as "the words of the fathers." These are spoken by their family or community members, and derive from the religious, political, and economic dogmas that predominate in locations where university students were born and raised. Prominent among these are principles such as ambition and hard work yield greater economic gain; and that following institutional rules results in rewards parallel to the effort expended. Contrastively, Bakhtin imagined other discourses he called internally persuasive, that individuals consider convincing for themselves.

> Internally persuasive discourse [is} tightly interwoven with 'one's own word'… the internally persuasive word is half ours and half someone else's Its creativity and productiveness consists precisely because in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts (1981, p. 346).

It is internally persuasive discourses that I hoped my students might develop as they met more and differing viewpoints in their reading, film viewing, volunteering, and writing about themselves in my course. I hoped these might be discourses that construct all youth as full of possibilities and assets and their families and schools as potential partners in acquiring these.

Context: **State University and Lakeville, USA**

The campus and community contexts in which this research was conducted were majority white a decade ago and remain so today. State University (all place and peoples' names are pseudonyms) enrolled 31, 600 undergraduates in 2020-2021, including 100 American Indians, 1,000 African Americans, 2700 Latinos/as, and 3200 Asians (State University Data Digest, 2020-2021, March 2021). A decade earlier, there were only 25,000 undergraduate students enrolled; however, a parallel number of whites and students of color attended. Few students of color attend my class each semester, usually 3-6 in a total group of 90 enroll each academic term.

Lakeville, the city in which the university is located is a mid-sized, Midwestern one with a population of 263,000 people, 79% of whom are white and 21% are people of color (worldpopulation review.com, June 19, 2021). The local schools enroll 27, 000 pupils K-12, half of whom live in poverty and nearly half of whom are pupils of color—19% African Americans, 19% Latino/a, 9% Asian, and .4% American Indian (Lakeville Schools Website, 2021). Contrasts such as these between those teaching and those taught fuel many misunderstandings between groups, and frequently prevent teachers from seeing their students as having intellectual promise.

Methods

The three university students whose stories I retell in this text were students at State University enrolled in a general introductory education course I taught between 2010 and 2021. I drew on life history semi-structured interview

protocols (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to gather data in multiple interviews from each student and selected three whose stories were of particular relevance for this text. In total, I amassed a corpus of interviews with over 60 participants in the decade-long period I was researching this group. In particular, I was asking about their life stories from childhood though adulthood and the meanings, values, and emotions attached to these. Following Institutional Review Board protocols at State University, I waited until all grades were submitted each semester before contacting students for interviews. All interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed, following which I sent the transcripts to the university students, requesting their assent for the accuracy of the transcribed material and promising to alter anything they wished removed or changed in the documents.

Next, I followed standard procedures for analyzing such qualitative data (Graue & Walsh, 1998), coding it for both inductive and deductive themes. I searched both for inductive recurring themes I expected might be present in the data—those that bubbled up about volunteering with youth whose identities are unlike one's own and problems that resulted. I also searched for various deductive codes—for example, those present about the effects of various "interventions" on prospective teachers' thinking and talk.

The Course: Reading, Film Viewing, Volunteer Experiences, and Personal Writing

Reading

In the course, I ask that enrolled students read both novels for young adolescents as well as academic texts. The novels showcase characters with identities that often differ from university students' own—for the most part white, cisgender, heterosexual ones, and are designed to showcase challenges youth face and ways they attempt to resolve these. These provide rich substance for conversations where readers imagine themselves as characters in the novel and how they might react if the teen heroine/hero were their friend, family member, or student. Further, we draw on the academic articles for guidance regarding what possibilities exist for altering characters' sometimes precarious well-being in their families, schools, communities, and other institutions. After reading such authors as sj miller (2013, 2016a, 2016b) concerning the rights and responsibilities of schools and teachers for queer and transgender youth and Zeus Leonardo (Leonardo & Grubb, 2014) concerning race and racism in schooling, prospective teachers debate what might be among the most favorable actions possible in which to engage when youth are facing dilemmas in their lives.

Film Viewing

I also ask that everyone view two films (from a list of 10-12 popular recent movies) featuring teachers. These often show teachers who are constructed as heroines/heroes rescuing low-income, disabled, or academically deficient students of color from their families or neighborhoods. We assess the films based on the starring teachers' goals, practices they implement to achieve these, and the outcomes for students of teachers' behaviors. Most often, but not always, the teachers depicted are white and middle class and differ on nearly every dimension of identity from their students. Among films we view and have evaluated include: *Freedom Writers, Stand and Deliver, Lean On Me, Music of the Heart, The Soloist, The Great Debaters,* and *Dangerous Minds.*

Most often, those enrolled have never viewed such movies for other than their entertainment value and are surprised by how students and teachers are portrayed—by the apparent heroism of the teachers and the general grave deficiencies depicted of students. We talk about how these potentially further imbue U.S. moviegoers with particular images of who youth of color are and what they can do with the help of their families and communities without intervention by white teachers. The power of such films seems to be recognizing the similarity of their messages for viewers, that they potentially reinforce other parallel images of youth and their paucity of assets as seen on television and depicted in other media. Once acknowledged, university students begin asking why these images have been generated and what they have been designed to do.

Volunteer Experiences

Volunteer work with children and youth located in after-school programs or community centers or campus facilities serving many youth living in poverty is threaded throughout the semester. Students are asked to complete 25 hours of volunteer work during the semester; adjustments are made for the summer term. This service complements the reading, film viewing, and writing, etc. students do over the span of the course. This volunteer work is crafted to introduce them to the dilemmas teachers and others in the "helping professions" face each day, and must work to resolve. Frequently, volunteers begin their work with trepidation concerning youth who differ from them racially or ethnically, socioeconomically, or in language background. Often, volunteers initially take up the rhetoric of the teachers and other personnel working in these programs, and repeat their sometimes derisive comments about youth when talking about their service. Occasionally, they dispute these evaluations. More frequently, they evidence learning over the semester that their initial views of youth abilities, assets, and needs are more complex than they initially have thought. Such reconsiderations often take place incrementally as students read and think and talk again and again with one another about what they have seen and heard and to what they attribute youth behaviors.

Over time, I have struggled with what to call these moments of clarity concerning youth and how and why they behave in ways they do. Recently, as I read Givens' (2021) and Wilkerson's (2020) books where they rename what we all have long called "empathy" to something termed "radical empathy", I recognized the power of labeling an act with a fresh term . This christening of empathy as "radical empathy" emphasizes the strong and required connection from feelings we have for people with actions we may take on their behalf.

And so, I began to call these revelatory moments students have when they recognize the folly of their previous characterizations of youth as "profound interruptions." These encompass both an understanding of youth behaviors they previously denied and a new, more sympathetic interpretation of these on which to craft one's interactions with them. In each of these sections of this text—titled reading, viewing films, volunteer work, and finally, writing personal essays, I discuss different powerful contributors to such profound interruptions. Next, I turn to what seems to be a key intervention in university students' thinking—writing about themselves.

Writing Personal Essays

Perhaps one of the most promising strategies I have engaged has been asking prospective teachers to write about intertwined dimensions of their own identity, and to explore how these have been understood and interpreted by "others. "I ask that they write about dual aspects of their identity—choosing from their race/ethnicity, social, class, and/or gender identity or sexual orientation and to write a personal essay about these. This assignment enables students to write about how they feel and think about themselves and what other people have said and done that have generated these emotions and ideas. Often, university students write a series of vignettes or a single time when it became clear to them how other people interpreted their racial and ethnic identity or sexual orientation, for example.

This assignment has not substantially changed over time. What has changed are the number of examples I offer for students to use as possible models for their work. This year I offered examples from my own life growing up as a working-class Latinx child in a small New England town, and well-known "celebrity" autobiographies to show how students might write about possible dimensions of themselves. The latter included the highly engaging life stories of three persons of color: Pulitzer prize-winning playwright Quaira Hudes (2021), United States Senator Maisie Hirono (2021) (the only contemporary United States senator who is an immigrant), and African American television journalist Don Lemon. (2021). These exemplars are meant to show differing rather than "correct" approaches to talking about one's family, immigrant status, and/or sexual orientation, for example. And, in my case, are designed to demonstrate my willingness as their teacher to be disclosive and self-reflective.

I ask that students write this essay near the end of course after conducting copious amounts of reading both academic articles and young adolescent fiction, film viewing, volunteer work with young people, and discussions. A version of this assignment from my summer 2021 course follows:

> … use the book you have read as a possible model for how you might write about yourself in the following autobiographical assignment. These books offer possibilities about how one writes about oneself and are offered because they are well-regarded by critics as intriguing narratives of identity. Write an essay telling stories of two of three aspects of your identity—social class, sexual orientation or gender, and/or your race and/or ethnicity. This paper should explore how these dimensions of your identity have affected your social, cultural, and economic well being; how these have made you feel about yourself and your schooling over time; and how you behaved in various circumstances given how you were positioned via how other people interpreted dimensions of your identity.

The ultimate goal is for prospective teachers and others to think about how like their students they are, that their own personal success largely has been enabled or thwarted by the same assumptions and attributions they make regarding youth with whom they work. Alongside other course activities, these essays help students uncover their feelings about people they see as unlike themselves and begin to consider how they may have thought about, talked about, and

interacted with them. Multiple and varied activities in the course provide a foundation for reconsidering who we each are as individuals and how we came to be that way through the multiple discourses surrounding us as well as the people with whom we interact in family, community, social, and cultural contexts.

In the section titled "Retold Tales" below, I recount stories then prospective teachers and others told me about aspects of their identities and how these fresh understandings enabled them to think anew about their students and the possibilities they embodied. I refer to these understandings as "profound interruptions" as they encompass big "a ha" moments that prospective teachers and others have coupling critical reflections on youth behaviors with links to aspects of their personal identities and reading, talking, and writing conducted in the course. As I narrate below, these "interruptions" occur at different times and have varying course triggers for prospective teachers. As readers will see, what they have in common across individuals are a link to university students' own personal experiences and identities which the course assignments help them excavate.

Retold Tales: Stories of Former Students and Profound Interruptions That Transpired

What follows are a few retellings of profound interruptions that occurred with university students in my general education course over the past decade. As these occurred in different semesters and sometimes a year or two apart, I did not initially see them as being generated by the particular intersections of course content students were presented. I also did not see the potential power of the personal storytelling (and other activities) nor emphasize or enhance the telling of self-told tales in any way. It only is now as I look retrospectively at my teaching and research that I see the potential power of these links made between their personal lives and the lives of their students to propel changes in thinking and practices. I also did not initially see the strength of disruption that these tales generated. The power of the profound interruption only was fully apparent when I heard its narration from the individual students affected. They, too, seemed a bit surprised and disconcerted by how these stories influenced their thinking.

Cameron Harris

I begin with retelling a tale of Cameron Harris, a biracial prospective teacher who, at the time he enrolled in the course in 2015 was 19 years old, and was thinking about becoming a middle school teacher. I wrote about Cameron and his struggles in understanding the experiences and assets of African American middle school youth he was tutoring when conducting volunteer work (Gomez & Johnson Lachuk, 2018).

Cameron recalled being a popular middle school student himself, attending Riverside Middle, the same school where he volunteered. Cameron's adoptive parents were an African American and white professional couple who fulfilled U. S. authoritative discourses concerning parenting. Cameron stated that they consistently helped him and his brother with homework; were always present at teachers' conferences; and enthusiastically attended Cameron's extra-curricular dance team performances. Unlike Cameron, the boys he was tutoring were doing poorly in school, were frequently absent or late to class, failed to turn in assigned

homework, and often slept the school day away. Like his teacher, Cameron attributed the boys' behavior to indifference about school and teachers.

One day, in exasperation, instead of dismissing the boys' behavior as simply deficient, he asked one of them to explain why he was behaving "badly." The boy, David, burst into tears and told Cameron "he could not sleep at his house as 'everyone was up all night and yelling'" (Gomez & Johnson Lachuk, 2018, pp. 107). Cameron was surprised and contrite at his previous assessments of the boy's behavior as simply uncaring and neglectful of schoolwork. Earlier in the semester, he had read Bassuk, Konnath, and Volk's (2006) text about complex trauma and its outcomes for students, including inattention to instruction and lack of motivation, as well as school truancy. He wrote in his autobiography that he was not sure if David was experiencing traumatic events like those Bassuk writes about: "But, it is clear that David's home life like not sleeping and being upset a lot is negatively affecting his presence in school, participation grades, and important relationships with his teachers. It is *not* [Cameron's emphasis] all his fault" (Gomez & Johnson Lachuk, 2018, pp. 107).

Cameron saw that his own parents had prioritized school and made quiet times available for study and sleep. Considering his own actions on David's behalf, Cameron suggested to the teacher that he could take David to the nearby school library if a similar event occurred in the future. He imagined a quiet space away from his peers might enable David time to obtain both needed rest and focus on the undone school assignments. To this suggestion, the teacher readily agreed.

Further, Cameron wondered about the curriculum students were offered and if it engaged them, writing:

> This [the pedagogy he had witnessed at the school site] caused me to reflect back on Anyon's (1980) *Social class and hidden curriculum* where she discusses how teachers within working class schools often make their students follow certain procedures, which are usually incredibly mechanical, and involve rote behaviors with little decision-making and choice. This was almost identical to what I witnessed at Riverside (his volunteer site) (Gomez & Johnson Lachuk, 2018, p. 108).

Incrementally, Cameron was initiating less judgmental assessments of youth, and replacing the biases he brought to interactions with youth with more careful questioning about why they were behaving in ways they did. He wrote that,

> As we saw in *Precious Knowledge* (a film about schooling in Phoenix, Arizona) each student expressed that one of the best things about their teachers was that they were incredibly relatable and cared deeply for all their students … What made the teachers so wonderful was their ability to extend themselves to all of their students while presenting an image of each of them in a unique, different,

> and special way. This has made me conscious of the work, and effort that I must put in to be an effective, caring, and compassionate teacher (Gomez & Johnson Lachuk, 2018, p. 109).

Synthesizing the reading, film viewing, volunteer work, and personally reflective writing in the course enabled Cameron to make a profound interruption in his thinking and initiate fresh, internally persuasive ideas about the potential and assets of all youth. In particular, he began to think that teachers play a significant emotional role in propelling all students towards success, and to do so means conveying empathy and compassion to them. He imagined coupling such radical empathy entailed both caring and actions aimed at youth support.

Mandi Williams

Like Cameron Harris, Mandi Williams was biracial with an African American father and white mother. Unlike Cameron, she grew up in poverty, with a frequently incarcerated, alcoholic father and a mother employed in the food service industry. Like Cameron, Mandi hoped to be a teacher. She enrolled in my course in 2012 when she was 21 years old, and stood out from her peers by her strongly conflicted perspectives concerning why students of color fail in school.

She was ambivalent about who was responsible for the school failures of students of color—students themselves or their teachers. For example, as she said in one interview: "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, not like me" (Gomez, 2014). However, she also attributed her five siblings' school suspensions and frequent discipline to their own lack of conformity to school rules. She had observed her mother's attempts to support her children in meetings with school staff, only to be continually rebuffed. Contrastively, Mandi saw her own motivation and rule conformity led to excellent grades and school rewards. She played an instrument in the school band and also participated in school athletics. She thought if her siblings and other youth had worked harder, they, too, would have reaped academic prizes.

After volunteering for a few weeks at Riverside Middle School where Cameron also worked, she noted that her tutee, who was struggling with reading, did not receive much attention from her classroom teacher. She noted that: "It could be only when I am in the room, but I feel like she [the teacher] ignores the fact my student does not pay attention or seem engaged. (Gomez, 2014, p. 55). At other times, she saw teachers maintaining careful vigilance around the behavior of students of color, which resulted in punishments such as suspensions that her siblings had regularly received.

In writing about herself at the end of the semester, she expressed that like many students of color with whom she worked, she saw herself as being largely ignored by school staff:

> I do not think many of my teachers were invested in the students they taught. My guidance counselor at [she names a high school nearby] was not a large help to me (Mandi's emphasis) in terms of support or encouragement to choose more challenging courses. ... [If I were a teacher at Riverside] … I think I would place more emphasis on getting to know my students and establishing a relationship that fosters success (Gomez, 2014, p. 56).

Mandi commented on how teachers talked about and interacted with students living in poverty and those of color. She said a result of deficit ways of understanding such students was that they became responsible for their school failure, much as she saw her sisters were viewed as responsible for their own school failure. In her personal writing, she reflected on McKenzie and Scheurich's article (2004) concerning "equity traps" (uncritical habits of thinking by school personnel blocking development of socially just practices in schools) as influential in altering her thinking about students' assets and possibilities. She wrote:

> … then I began to see that [ignoring a persons' race or ethnicity or language background] 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. (Gomez, 2014, p. 55).

Mandi came to see that it was not one's race as a teacher that would "solve" students' problems, but the relationships one constructed as a teacher with one's students and their families that would support mutual understandings and care. She began to see that individual students might need different strategies and tools to enhance their opportunities for success. Developing such relationships and understandings became an internally persuasive discourse for Mandi, one which had a profound interruption in her thinking, and to which she was committed.

Eva Ivanov

In 2013, Eva Ivanov enrolled in the course. She was a twenty-year old from a Russian immigrant family who had come to the United States fifty years earlier to improve their economic well-being. Eva was raised in an extended family in the largest city in the Midwestern state where State University is located. She knew firsthand about poverty from attending what she affectionately called "Camp Grandma" every summer as a child. Unable to afford childcare when school was not in session, Eva's parents sent her and her brother to her grandmother's tiny apartment for summer care. There she was treated to her grandmother's home cooking and viewing of popular television game shows all day. She explained, "We could count on Grandma. She made everything possible. We did not go out much to play as it was not the safest neighborhood, but we were fed, my Grandma was kind, and we had each other for company" (Gomez, 2016, p. 25).

Eva knew that her summer "camp" was unconventional, but she was unprepared for the ways she heard school staff sometimes conversing about children living in similar low-income contexts. It seemed many people assumed deficiencies in these families rather than understanding their financial dilemmas.

Eva also saw poverty close-up as a university student working in a local community center as a homework helper and babysitting for a family who lived near campus and worked multiple jobs. She contrasted this family's circumstances with that of many families in her home community for whom she had been a babysitter: "In Cityville … children all have their own bed and often their own bedroom. I never had an experience [before] where children snuggle with their parents on the floor because they all don't have a bed" (Gomez, 2016, p. 27). Eva was surprised and dismayed to hear school staff disparage such people as they were working so hard to provide for their children.

Eva also read Anyon's (1981) article concerning how some schools aimed their curriculum for different social classes of children. She commented that the children in her story of babysitting would be "groomed for the world" via how their parents provided for them (Gomez, 2016, p. 27). Additionally, Eva wrote about her experience at the community center as being pivotal for her new understandings of what all children needed. She wrote: "This center has taught me the importance of connecting with each [her emphasis] student, and making him feel included as an individual, not just as part of the group" (Gomez, 2016, p. 27).

Working at the community center and babysitting for a family living in challenging circumstances enabled Eva to see the importance of valuing all families' different, but worthy assets. She recognized that going to her grandmother's apartment in the summers for daycare had enabled her parents to acquire more schooling and higher-paid employment. This was a scenario reinforced by authoritative discourses that privilege hard work and the promise of rewards to follow. However, Eva began to realize this differed from many families' experiences, and they remained trapped in low-income jobs, regardless of their hard work and sacrifices. Eva argued all families deserve respect rather than disparagement. She concluded her personal essay with these words: "This class shook me out of a haze that sought to cover the inequities of the educational system and forced me to believe that my education was the standard for all children in the U.S. and beyond. I believe I have just begun a transition into consciousness" (Gomez, 2016, p. 27). Eva recognized there was a great deal she did not understand, but that she had initiated a profound interruption in a complacency she formerly inhabited.

Discussion

The tales of Cameron, Mandi, and Eva I retell here highlight the key role that linking course content to university students' personal experiences plays in their development of profound interruptions in their thinking. For Cameron, hearing his tutee David weep in frustration about his inability to sleep or complete homework amidst family turmoil triggered a memory of reading Bassuk, Konnath, and Volk's (2006) article on complex trauma. It also caused Cameron to consider how his own family's economic circumstances privileged them to prioritize rest and time for other activities, and that not all families were so fortunate as theirs. This new perception made him feel ashamed of his former characterizations of David.

Mandi herself had reaped many rewards for her ambition, hard work, and conformity to all institutional rules despite the family challenges she confronted. Mandi aimed to avoid the difficulties her siblings faced. However, it only was after observing a teacher at her tutoring site simultaneously seem to "ignore" a student's academic needs and at times act with hyper-vigilance concerning youth behavior, that she began to question the weight of students' personal responsibility for their academic fates. Reading McKenzie and Scheurich's (2004) article concerning equity traps sparked recollections of her siblings' school failures and her own lack of guidance as a low-income student who hoped to gain college admission, but had no family resources on which to rely. She began to see that building relationships with youth and their families might enable school personnel to tailor services to students' needs and both support their assets and head off trouble.

From her personal experiences, Eva understood that every family member needed to contribute to the economic well-being of the group. To help pay for her tuition and housing at State, she worked at a local toy store, and did a lot of babysitting for couples who lived off-campus. She fondly recalled how her grandmother had pitched in and taken care of her and her brother while her parents completed their own educations. What shocked and dismayed her were detrimental ways that she heard school personnel speak of families who all were working, often at low wage employment in long, often undesirable shifts, to contribute to everyone's well-being. She had read Anyon's (1981) text concerning how schools aimed curriculum at students according to their social class, and imagined the rote, mechanical curriculum and pedagogy the children for whom she babysat might receive. She thought they then might only hope to replicate their parents' lives impacted by low wages. Eva also was concerned that school staff had little understanding of what families valued and how hard they worked to bring an only imagined future to reality.

For each of these State U. students, a combination of reading, volunteer work, and writing about their personal experiences formed a web of key elements that enabled development of profound interruptions to their thinking. Interwoven into all three of these retold tales is the role radical empathy plays in their thinking. As each began reconsidering dilemmas facing youth in their volunteer sites, critical questions emerged: How do these students feel? How are teachers and other school staff contributing to their support? And, importantly, what might my role be in providing such help?

All three were able to understand the feelings of youth with whom they worked; they witnessed and empathized with students' suffering. Mandi had seen the effects of school failure on her own sisters and the drain on her mother's already strapped resources this had caused. She was determined to help her future students avoid such outcomes. The concerns Eva raised were not ones accompanied by quick or easily implemented resolutions either. However, she committed herself to addressing those dilemmas in future classrooms. Cameron alone immediately was able to respond to the dilemmas facing his tutee, David. He saw a potential role for himself in providing solace for David when he was in distress and took action to reduce that anguish. Further, Cameron saw his perspectives on future students conducted with his eyes on what Grant (2012, p. 914) called "developing flourishing lives" for them, understanding their experiences in the contexts of their own families, communities, and cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

Through profound interruptions in their thinking, all three recognized the potential consequences of their own actions for alleviating students' distress and developing strategies for their support. Further, they were able to interrupt the discourses with which their practices previously had been guided, providing openings for internally persuasive, more socially just ways of thinking and acting to flourish. Each also recognized the power of what Givens (2021) and Wilkerson (2021) call radical empathy for developing understandings of youth experiences that differed from as well as were consonant with their own.

Some readers may be left wondering why I did not choose to retell tales of white, middle class prospective teachers who have experienced profound interruptions in their thinking. Those teacher candidates are ones who primarily populate teacher education programs around the nation and often are criticized for their lack of understanding of contemporary student populations. As I have tried to narrate here, it is not simply a task of replacing one group of teacher candidates with another whose racial backgrounds and socioeconomic status mirror those of their potential students. Neither Cameron, Mandi, or Eva came to teacher education ready to "befriend the minds" of all their students and prepare them to live "flourishing lives" (Grant, 2012). What they did bring, as they began considering a career in teaching, was a willingness to consider other peoples' families, communities, and cultural backgrounds as valuable and worthy locations to explore. They also were keen to interrogate their own knowledge, skills, and assets for what was missing, and to engage in earnest inquiries into where they might discover possible answers. It was to those teacher candidates I turned when recruiting participants for my research into how and with what outcomes profound interruptions might occur. And therein lies the reasoning for these particular three retold tales.

Further, I am suggesting that rather than "parsing the practice of teaching" (Kennedy, 2016) into incrementally discrete procedures, we might systematically offer all prospective teachers opportunities to think analytically and holistically about the students they teach. Redirecting prospective teachers' attention on their visible pedagogical practices with "integrated portraits" (p. 16) of their relationships and interactions with youth holds promise both for those teaching and those taught. As prospective teachers participate in field experiences over time and in varied contexts, we can offer them ongoing opportunities to resee those whom they envision as "others." It will be challenging for the enterprise of teacher education to alter its orientation from mastery of distinct and measurable content and discrete instructional moves to engaging teacher candidates in sensitively examining their practices and outcomes. However, as my stories of Cameron, Mandi, and Eva demonstrate, the benefits to be reaped are substantial.

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