Teacher Candidates and their Transformed Understanding of Diversity and Social Justice in a Teacher Education Program

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Abstract

For decades, the United States has experienced demographic forces which have slowly and persistently reshaped the population of minorities served in education. Increasingly, students come from families with diverse linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Research states that teacher preparation programs which are dominated by a white middle class workforce seem to consistently provide insufficient preparation to cultural diversity and social justice consciousness for candidates to function well in this new America. They lack research-based knowledge and skills of diversity and social justice to input culturally competent outcomes in their new roles as agents of transformative change.

This study was undertaken to capture the transformative changes in diversity and social justice to thirty candidates during their very first course and clinical experience in a Teacher Preparation Program. Using the four seasons approach to ethnography, the researcher collected extensive data. The analysis showed that changes in visions of diversity and social justice did take place in a fairly shorter time frame. They demonstrated cultural awareness, fluidity, and knowledge of the self and others in a broader concept of the society after yearlong instruction and field experiences. Correspondingly, the researcher will discuss these major concepts that emerged and offer suggestions for teacher educators on how to proactively prepare candidates to authenticate diversity and social justice within their classrooms.

Keywords: diversity, social justice, teacher candidates, four seasons ethnography

In the next decade, American public schools and colleges can expect a number of changes ones they can't ignore. For years, demographic forces have slowly and persistently reshaped the population of minorities served in education (Banks, 2019). Increasingly, students come from families with diverse linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds (Nieto, 2014). Teacher candidates need to be prepared for this reality. Researchers like Noguera (2006) and Delpit (2012) have shown that students in public schools who are challenged by poverty, high mobility, and violence are capable of achieving the same aims as students in more privileged communities, but only when teachers challenge persistent inequalities that devalue the identities of some students while overvaluing others and work with the community to provide the support students need. Teacher education programs still have a long way to go in preparing teachers to be effective culturally, ethnically, racially, and even linguistically in diverse students (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Sleeter, 2013; Ukpokodu, 2003; & Zeichner, 2009). More than 30 years of research have revealed that the work

of teaching and the challenge for teacher education are rampant in grappling with these components, with direct attention to fostering educational opportunities for which teachers and schools are responsible for (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Banks, Cochran-Smith, Moll, Richer, Zeichner, LePage, Darling-Hammond, Duffy & McDonald, 2005; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Shulman, 1987). Of late, research by Durgunoğlu and Hughes (2010) painted a grim picture at several different levels on how unprepared the U.S teachers are toward diversity and social justice concerns as in teachers working with culturally and linguistically historically marginalized students.

Knowledge Construction in the Context of Transformative Understanding of Diversity and Social Justice in a Teacher Education Program

When referring to diversity and social justice approaches to teacher education, the researcher is referring to those traditions, including critical pedagogy, multicultural education, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-colonialist, and feminist approaches to education, that actively resist the dominant norms and Western canon of thinking in theory and practice (Apple, 2019; Banks, 2019; DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2012; Sleeter & Carmon, 2017). I am using this term to embody equity-orientated approaches encompassing the development of individuals' socio-consciousness, identity and, self-efficacy, which ultimately bring about the development of social justice consciousness. In practice, the above paradigms seek to actively address the dynamics of oppression, recognize society as stratified along historically-rooted, institutionally-sanctioned group lines (that include race, class, gender, etc.) (Banks, 2019).

The Significance of Sociocultural Consciousness

Learning is a social process because it is a product of culture and society (Vygotsky, 1978). This means socially conscious teachers build on the personal and cultural strengths of the learners, deepen their understanding of the curriculum from multiple points of view, and make the classroom community inclusive and inspiring (Nieto, 2014). Nevertheless, teachers become sensitive to the learning needs of students through culturally responsive pedagogical practices (Banks, 2019). These practices include preparing students for rigorous work by focusing their attention on their cultural processing and engaging them in interactive practices that allow them to develop the necessary proficiencies to relieve them from cultural disorientations and stress (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ultimately, sociocultural learning has the intention of creating a community of learners where all diverse students feel safe, secure, and valued (Darling-Hammond, 2010). For example, research by Cochran-Smith (2005) found that socially conscious teachers learn to better understand their own sociocultural identities, which in turn increases caring, compassion, and the empowerment of their students. Ultimately, it is through socio-cultural consciousness that teachers come to know that the United States educational system gives false and misguided promises to some and privileges others. It is their role to challenge these conceptions and side with these marginalized students, especially immigrants (Lee, 2011). Students too, experience and develop this sociocultural consciousness through their teachers.

Additionally, research by Noguera (2006) revealed that teachers who integrate sociocultural philosophies in their classroom are more open to parent and community engagement. Thus, students ultimately benefit because knowledge is exchanged in multiple systems – the home, the community, and the school itself. These researchers also found that when teachers collaborate with newly-arrived immigrants and work with them between home and school by developing a home-

school literacy project, there is higher scholastic achievement. Both Cheng-Ting, Kyle, and McIntyre (2008) and Banks (2018) also found clear evidence that when teachers and culturally and linguistically-different parents work together and are involved in the community, student achievement, attendance, and standardized test scores increase. Prominent scholars (Apple, 2019; Darling-Hammond, 2010); Gay, 2018; Sleeter, 2013; and Villegas, 2007) have explored the needs of teachers for diverse students to create pedagogy based on teachers' understanding of how the social system operates and reproduces stratification. Teachers need to develop a critical mindset which enables them to better teach the oppressed groups in the society. Thus, sociocultural consciousness is a very significant aspect in teacher education today.

The Significance of Identity and Self-Efficacy

We teach who we are and hence students need a positive sense of their own identity in order to thrive. Research by Howard (2006) states that some teachers tend to impose their own beliefs on students in the classroom which brings down the morale of their students who already have scars due to cultural deprivation and marginalization. It is imperative for teachers to look at their students' life experiences and the curriculum through the eyes of the students. Thus, this is why Apple (2019) suggested that teachers need to stand back and be critical of the curriculum which spreads hegemonic tendencies and further marginalizes the minority's identity. Additionally, he suggested that teachers should invite students to be involved in problem-solving and identity assignment practices. Furthermore, Taylor (2002) acknowledged in his research that teachers need to understand not only their students' personal identity, but also their collective identity in order to support them well in academic, social, and emotional pursuits. This is mainly because, without these opportunities, schooling experiences which occupy many hours and years of our minority students become irrelevant. Significantly for most disadvantaged groups, formal schooling is bewildering because parents who are new arrivals and less educated have no clues of the systematic set of identity guidelines to their children.

Additionally, research by Patel (2013) revealed that individuals' gender, class, ability, race, immigration status, and even socioeconomic class shape their identities and behaviors along with how they are positioned. Both teachers and students' identities are shaped in line with gender, class, ability, race, and socioeconomic class. In a classroom full of immigrants and ELLs, teachers' individual interactions, respect, and dialogue matter in making students secure, comprehensively learn, and thrive. Concurrently with a strong identity formation comes self-efficacy. According to Guskey (1988), a sense of self-efficacy is the aspect of being confident in one's abilities to successfully meet goals. In other words, there is a strong correlation between a higher teacher efficacy and students' own sense of self-efficacy. Researchers have studied self-efficacy at the college level. Fan and Mak (1998) explored the construction and validation of measuring self-efficacy in social settings experienced by colleges in educational institutions in Australia. The researchers used a sample of 228 undergraduates, among whom 91 were native Australians, 90 were also natives but with non-English speaking background, and 47 were immigrants. The researchers found that four factors mattered: 1) the absence of social difficulties, 2) social confidence, 3) sharing interests, and 4) friendship initiatives. Majer (2009) explored the correlation between self-efficacy and academic progress among ethnically diverse first-generation urban community college students. With the increase in grade point average (GPA) among college students, the findings

showed that "self-efficacy for education is an important cognitive resource among ethnically diverse students attending community colleges, whose immigrant generation status might have an impact on their educational success" (p. 1).

In conclusion, identity and self-efficacy of teachers are building blocks for successful teaching. Teachers need to understand and conceptualize these concepts to support minority students well in their overall learning pursuits so as to eventually become productive citizens.

The Significance of Social Justice Consciousness

Socio-consciousness leads to a strong belief in oneself (identity formation) (Banks, 2019) which in turn leads to self-efficacy (confidence in your abilities) (Sleeter, 2013) and ultimately leads to the higher commitment of activism toward social justice. Conceptions of social justice vary from the hard sciences, psychology, medicine, and architecture because some of these theories focus on different aspects such as rules, regulations, norms, and attitudes, while others consider behaviors at different levels, such as individual, group, and nation (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In this context, social justice is based on the concept of human rights and equality, and can be defined as the way in which human rights are manifested in the everyday lives of people at every level of society. In essence, it embodies four interrelated principles: equity, access, participation, and rights of every person which include race (racism), gender (sexism), age (ageism), religion, and sexuality (heterosexism) (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2012). The goal of social justice in education is full and equal participation of all groups in society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs (Sleeter, 2013). Schools, consciously or not, have the function of sorting individuals to particular locations in the socioeconomic hierarchy based on academic performance and teachers are critical in this process (Apple, 2019). It is this sorting process which has significant influence on the quality of students' individual lives. So, there is a moral and ethical dimension of teaching all students fairly (Nieto, 2014). Compared with their White, middle class peers, students from low-income and racial/ethnic minority groups have lower scores on achievement tests (Lee, 2011), are overrepresented in special education programs (Anyon, 2005; Burden & Byrd, 2019) and lower academic tracks (Ukpokodu, 2003), are more likely to repeat a grade and drop out of high school (Darder & Torres, 2014), and are less apt to enroll in and graduate from college (Nieto, 2014). So, preparing teachers who are responsive to the students' population that schools have historically left behind is imperative. Social justice consciousness helps teacher candidates learn to integrate students' diverse cultures into curriculum, creating learning environments to reduce prejudice and oppression, developing equitable pedagogy for all students, incorporating multiple knowledge construction processes, and getting involved in empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 2019).

As such, it is imperative for teacher candidates to learn and conceptualize this concept today in a broader sense. Moreover, socio-consciousness leads to a strong belief in oneself (identity formation) (Banks, 2019) which in turn leads to self-efficacy (confident in your abilities) (Sleeter, 2013) which ultimately leads to the higher commitment of activism toward social justice (Di Angelo & Sensoy, 2012). Nevertheless, examining the specific activities and practices in which teacher candidates participate, including the nature of participation as well as the knowledge and dispositions gained as a result of their participation in teacher education is worth exploring. Over 30 years of data demonstrate that diversity and social justice remain to be major concerns for teachers and teaching profession (Apple, 2019; Anyon, 2005; Banks, 2019; Chung & Harrison, 2015; Darolia, 2020; Delpit, 2014; DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2012; Grossman & McDonald, 2008;

Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 95; Sleeter & Carmon, 2017; Shulman, 1987; and Ukpokodu, 2003). Furthermore, research by Durgunoglu and Hughes (2010) found that most U.S teachers seem under-prepared to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students and even do not seem to know how to engage with them. In the study of more than 60 candidates focusing on self-efficacy, attitudes, perceived preparedness, and social justice consciousness, candidates demonstrated, among other aspects, poor self-perceptions, neglect, little interaction with students, lack of self-efficacy, and an insensitivity to linguistic and cultural differences.

This present study is therefore uniquely exploring how teacher candidates transformed their understanding of diversity and social justice in a teacher education program through the lenses of the four seasons approach to ethnographic methodology. To better understand how this development was taking place for the candidates, the researcher asked the following questions:

-What changes manifested in the candidates' understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity during the year study of the course?

-To what degree were the candidates growing toward a social justice consciousness?

Theoretical Framework

In an effort to utilize the sociohistorical lenses necessary to understand the experiences of the study participants, this research employed Critical Constructivism Thought (CCT) and the Intentional Instructional Strategy (IST) as its theoretical foundations. These lenses likewise allow teacher education candidates who are predominantly White, Female and Middle class to reflect their previous social constructed beliefs, ideas, understanding, experiences and perspectives and look at teaching and learning in a new transformed approach and position (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). Critical-constructivism looks at the existing systems and structure in the society to identify power dynamics and to critically evaluate them to make them visible, so as to create a political change around them (Brookhart, 2010). That means candidates will understand and clarify their roles as agents of change (Villegas, 2007). They will identify milestones and challenges as adolescents and develop their knowledge construction as historical, social, cultural, economic, and political in contexts. In other words, CCT seeks to illuminate teacher candidates concerning their inadequacies of their identity and sociocultural understanding, and how teacher education is acting as the stumbling block or education oppression to the diverse poor students, students of color, and minorities (Sleeter, 2013). By exposing these concepts, many if not most students' feelings of disequilibrium and frustrations will occur at first as they move from their current beliefs and begin to develop both a critical perspective and viable professional stance toward learning and teaching (Delpit, 2012). From an epistemological standpoint, CCT affirms the uniqueness of these teacher candidates who have a limited scope, coming out from cultural myths prevalent in today's education systems where knowledge is seen as discovery of an external truth which therefore leads to the picture of the teacher in a central role as transmitter of objective truths to students (Brookhart, 2010). Consequently, this leads to another myth of absolute control which renders the teacher's role in the classroom as a controller and hence the gradual release of responsibility is the best option to get things done (Burden & Byrd, 2019). Nevertheless, this critical constructivism adds a greater emphasis on the actions for change of a learning teacher. With this framework they are assisted to disempowering cultural myths more visible, and hence more open to question through conversation and critical self-reflection. They gain communicative ethics that helps them initiate

and establish dialogue to develop cultural self-awareness and cultural fluency to work effectively with students and communities of diverse background (Banks, 2019).

IST theory, which some authors call "teaching on purpose," has a proven background of addressing the lack of alignment between research on learning to teach and teaching to learn and rigorous preparation of candidates to be practitioners (Grossman & McDonald, 2008). That implies that IST constantly helps practitioners make purposeful decisions based on well-defined series of objectives and continually assess progress and adjusts the strategies based on that assessment (Robinson, Kearns, Gresalfi, Sievert, & Christensen, 2015). Additionally, IST is vital to introducing teaching as a field of inquiry (Lee, 2011). As articulated by Nieto (2014), there is a strong correlation between IST and the preparing teachers to be committed activists in transforming the fundamental inequalities in schools. As this social justice approach in education calls for critical analysis of commonly held assumptions about who can learn, how students can learn, and the extent to which the analogy of education as the ladder of social mobility still holds in the United States today (Darder & Torres, 2014). Likewise, the researcher chooses IST for its strong correlation to social justice and hence social justice was the fundamental approach in this course. With these roots, teacher candidates examined their preconceived notions of race, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation and gender identity. They were intentionally asked to revisit the inequities inherent in their own educational experiences and understand potential ways to modify their thinking in order to work effectively with students who are from different cultural, linguistically, social, and economical backgrounds, as well as for those who learn and perform differently. Ultimately, CCT and IST provide the necessary critical lens that take into account the sociohistorical context of a specific group when examining behavior and exploring their transformation in a Teacher Education Program.

Method

The researcher used the Four Seasons of Ethnography approach. This is an ontological methodology that centers on the awareness of the researchers as human instruments, the natural cycles of knowledge, and historical and cultural contexts (González, 2000). In essence, the Four Seasons of Ethnography approach "necessitates sensitivity to self and other, but also includes all phases from preparing to enter the field (spring), to 'experiencing' data (summer), creating meaning (fall), and finally writing up reports (winter)" (Pitts, 2012, p. 2). By honoring this methodological rigor, the researcher recognized and attended to identity needs and dilemmas of teacher candidates by focusing on the interconnectedness between their selves and all that surround their individuality (e.g., people, places, objects, language, culture, ethnicity, and physical, emotional, and spiritual experiences, etc.) (Pitts, 2012). In other words, the Four seasons of Ethnography approach is therefore suited for this study which aims to critically examine how power, privilege, and dominant ontologies influence the transformative growth toward social justice in the process of learning to teach for diversity they will face in their k-12 classrooms (Sleeter, 2013).

Explication of the Four Seasons Paradigm Used

According to (González, 2000), the spring of ethnography (also known as emergent identity) is marked by preparation, anxiety, excitement, hopes, and desires for a successful ethnographic journey. During this time, the ethnographer asks, "Who am I? What are my strengths and weakness and how prepared am I to enter the field?" This is the foundation of what to come,

dreams of what might be, including the establishment of patterns of interaction, behavior, and introspection. In this study, the researcher made due preparation and establishment of patterns of interaction and behavior, along with initial/preliminary data collection. I sought the permission from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and tried to assess candidates' knowledge by asking to write a prompt about their perceptions of their preliminary understanding of social justice. Additionally, I followed them in the classroom while doing participant observation and also asked them to reflect their experiences in a weekly journal. In other words, this was the fundamental time of getting permission, assessing knowledge, creating an analysis of self, making a passive observation of the contexts and cultural sites, personal journaling, and finally taking stock of what tools are already in the bag and what other tools need to be acquired (Pitts, 2012).

The summer of ethnography (also known as actual recognizable ritual time) is comprehensive and requires nourishment and attention to detail (González, 2000). The researcher did observations, focus group interviews with candidates, journaling, and collected field notes and memos, in order to make available cultural experiences as part of this season (González, 2000). Nonetheless, the researcher endures the difficult work of "summer" to be able to harvest meaning in the fall. For the researcher, this did not mean only observing, participating, and talking with participants, but also included rest, nourishment, and health.

As for the fall ethnography-harvesting time, this was a precious time for organizing, and preparing for a long winter of writing, an exciting time to make meaning out of the data collected during the "summer" ethnography (Pitts, 2012). Fruits of the ceremony are shared and cerebrated. I did rigorous coding, analyzing and interpreting/analyzing the data while reflecting upon the experiences of teacher candidates. Then I continued rigorous coding, member checking, and triangulated the data systematically. I was able to carefully capture candidates' gradual transformed conceptions- their mindset, thinking, belief systems, attitudes, and overall understanding of diversity and social justice throughout the process.

Lastly, González (2000) perceived winter ethnography as the final ceremony after having experienced a significant transformation in knowledge and existence. The ethnographer emerges from the field with knowledge about culture and knowledge about the self (Pitts, 2012). During this time, I encouraged teacher candidates to practice writing the findings, evaluate their performances, and think about the decisions on dissemination of knowledge and how to maintain a relationship with the field, while I as the researcher was doing the same. In the end, retreating, writing, and rewriting, and bringing together all the fruits of the season I plunged into winter were ready as I reflected the natural process of the ceremony while reflecting on the cycles in creation and the way forward.

Setting, Course, and Participants

This study took place in a year single-subject teaching credential program at a large Midwestern urban university. The faculty revised a Diversity and Learning course with a field experience component designed to raise the candidates' cultural diversity awareness (Nieto, 2014) and social justice consciousness (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2012). The course focused on four components: 1) learning about culture and identity (Santamaria, 2009), 2) learning about culture as a school and community asset (Darolia, 2020; Sleeter & Carmon, 2017), 3) learning about myself as a teacher-to-be as an agent of change and social justice (Apple, 2019; DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2012), and 4) thinking about myself as a teacher to-be (Anyon, 2005; Zeichner, 2009). Thirty pre-service teachers were participants in this study, which focused on the first of four semesters in their secondary

teacher education program. Most of the participants were juniors at the mid-sized state university which largely serves a commuter population. Twenty-five were females; five were males. Two were African American; one was multiracial; one was an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, and the remainder were European Americans. Classes were conducted at the university two days a week while the field experience component was conducted at Fatima-Nsanje High School (pseudonym) twice a week.

Located about three miles from the university campus, the school is situated in a Latinx neighborhood with approximately 600 students: 60% Latinx, 20% Caucasian, 10% African American, 4% Pacific Islander, and 6% other. 73% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch (State Department of Education). The school was closed in 1990s due to budget shortfalls, much to the dismay of parents, students, and community members. It reopened in 2000 through a recommendation by an educational task force as a neighborhood community school that would provide learning supports for students and families. As a community school, the school was envisioned to merge neighborhood social service centers with the school academic system. Today, the school partners in collaboration with a neighborhood Social Services Center, a Community Center, a church community center, and the education task force which is connected to the university. The school partners collaborate to secure the necessary conditions to support student learning toward high school graduation and post-secondary readiness. The community, parents, service providers, business community, faith organizations and educators meet monthly to collaborate in alignment with students' objective goals and the overall general youth development ideals. The project ran from spring with 90-hr institute until the next spring. Teacher candidates were introduced to the school culture and student body through a cultural inquiry assignment which required them to get to know one student well enough to write a comparative analysis of the students' cultural background and their own. They also critically analyzed the assets of the school and community (Sleeter & Carmon, 2017) through the lenses of power, oppression, and the full-service community school movement as a reform strategy. Candidates were encouraged to question myths and stereotypes about urban schools (Darolia, 2020; Ramsay, 2005). This complex assignment required them to develop a bond with both their students and the mentor teachers who helped them with this project.

A second major assignment required them to write a critical reflection journal to develop the skill of continually learning from experiences (Santamaria, 2009). Candidates were required to reflect on theory during early field experiences at Fatima-Nsanje High School. Later they chose a critical incident that evoked a strong personal emotional response worthy of thought and attention. Using the different theories discussed in the course, the interns critically examined their unpreconceived beliefs and new perspectives.

The final assignment was a written reflection on professionalism--thinking about myself as a teacher to-be (Anyon, 2005; Zeichner, 2009). This assignment embodies different self-examinations and articulation of an individual teaching philosophy. Candidates were required to describe the teaching philosophy they developed from their early experiences at this urban school, their new understanding of cultural diversity, and the principles of social justice (Darolia, 2020; Santamaria, 2009).

Data Collection

As explored briefly before, the researcher collected many forms of data using different modalities in order to provide a rich-descriptive (Mertens, 2012) dynamic of change candidates were going through in this teacher education program. For a full year, the researcher collected field

notes that included seventeen class observations. Notes from conversations with mentor teachers during class-room observation; notes from conversations with the other education foundation professor, who supervised half of the practicum students each semester. The researcher also had three focus group open interviews with teacher candidates with audio recordings; and documents, curriculum resources and physical artifacts like lesson plans, assessments, critical reflective journal entries from teacher-candidates. This was done at the beginning and toward the end of the study where they reflected their assumptions, biases, framing political and moral perspectives and look at it in terms of diversity and social justice. The researcher also collected the cultural autobiography assignments at beginning and the end of the study and also a professionalism reflection thus, a critical component which showed their self-examination, teaching philosophy, and growth as a teacher during their early experience and at the end of the research study.

Data Analysis

Each data set was analyzed separately and in keeping with the nature of the data collected related to the research questions and the theoretical framework. Then I identified themes that emerged from the raw data using the inductive approach (Mertens, 2012). In that way, I established a clear link between the research objectives and the findings from the raw data (Pitts, 2012). For example, from the teacher candidates' artifacts (Critical reflection, cultural autobiography, and teacher profession), I read the transcripts several times side by side and identified the themes and categories. Then I developed a coding frame and new codes emerged. From there, the new themes emerged and I categorized them into three stages: initial impact stage (emerging), developing, and evolving. It is important to realize that all these categories were developed by studying the transcripts repeatedly and considering possible meanings and how these fitted with developing themes. And rigorous and systematic reading and coding of the transcripts allowed major themes to emerge.

Then I went on to read and code the transcripts and recordings of the three focus group interviews. Following the same induction strategy as above (Mertens, 2012; Pitts, 2012), the major themes to emerged. The segments of the texts were coded enabling an analysis of the interview segment on a particular theme, documenting the relations between themes, and identifying the importance of these themes in line with the research questions and the theoretical framework. The similarities and differences between and across them were explored and merged.

Analyses of the field notes about conversations in the class and the change in candidates' understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity were guided by an iterative coding scheme that emerged as I identified common themes, patterns, and differences and similarities among participants' viewpoints. I transcribed their comments and analyzed their experiences in terms of the following attributes: growth in knowledge and understanding of the value of diversity, explorative mind and engagement in critical thinking of problems/solutions, demonstration of understanding of instructor's theoretical frame work, awareness of self-knowledge and knowledge of others and how this impact teaching and learning, and their aptitude of professional sensitivity to cultural differences and learning modalities. Since I was interested in seeing growth, the field notes were divided into two segments and analyzed in a similar pre and post pattern as the other data. As figure 1 shares an example of my analysis process.

Figure 1: *Sample Changes in Responses to the Idea of Social Justice*

Teacher Candidate	Answer
Candidate One First two weeks: I am not sure. Is it a means to an end, a moral response? Later in the year: It is treating people with fairness.	
Candidate Two First two weeks: Is it punishment? I don't know? Later in the year: Examination of individual beliefs and redefining and modifying one's thinking in order to work effectively with students who are from different cultural, social and economic background as well as for those who learn and perform differently.	
Candidate Three First two weeks: I have no idea, please help. Later in the year: Value of individual differences and how they affect teaching and learning; Equality and fairness in the classroom.	
Candidate Four First two weeks: Is it what people call change? I am not sure. Later in the year: Equal education; Self-knowledge and empathy for others, cultural awareness and integration.	
Candidate Five First two weeks: What is it? Is it government interference? Later in the year: Developing a caring relationship towards others different from us; critical understanding and working towards a more just society.	

Through the process of data analysis, I realized that the experience of candidates required more than curriculum differentiation and teaching them about cultural diversity or theoretical underpinnings of racism, etc. Becoming a teacher involves negotiating their identities they bring into teacher education: those they develop while doing university coursework and those they develop when doing teaching practicums (Zeichner, 2009). These three identities and the feeling of discontinuity result to self-transformation into an agent of change (social justice). The data analysis for inductive method was determined by both the research objectives and multiple readings and interpretations of the raw data. Thus, the findings are derived from both the research objectives outlined by the researcher(s) and findings arising directly from the analysis of the raw data. That is why I felt very confident about this analysis and overall findings.

Findings

The analysis of the data revealed that although the candidates entered the program with little knowledge about culturally responsive teaching or social justice, they were able to make significant changes in their knowledge and attitudes in this period of time. Data from field notes, interviews, and student artifacts- critical reflection assignment, cultural autobiography, professional portfolio assignments reveal that candidate made significant strands of development and transformation. I conceptualized changes in visions of diversity and social justice; Changes in their reflectiveness and critical thinking; and changes in how they see themselves and their role as teachers-to be.

Changes in Visions of Diversity and Social Justice

I found that participants developed new knowledge and attitudes along five different strands of development.

1) Social justice as fighting for equity, access, participation and rights of the underprivileged.

The idea of their understanding of social justice changed over time according to data collected. During the first two weeks, their responses were vague and rumbling. For example, one candidate had this response "I am not sure, is it a means to an end?". However, the situation was different when the same written question was asked toward the end of the school year. With confidence the same student was comprehensive as follows: "For me social justice means treating people with fairness. It embodies equity, access, participation and fighting for the rights of the underprivileged which I believe teachers are called to be".

This suggests that candidates' vision of diversity was transformed from mere standing on the fence as a teacher and being colorblind to being proactive in taking a very active role in challenging the status quo and defend the helpless. Thus, being an agent of change, which embodies acknowledging the social and pedagogical awareness about the inequities and the need to combat them (Nieto, 2014).

2) Equality—the state or quality of being treated with fairness or given the same opportunity despite one's socioeconomic background, race, ethnicity, or other difference.

During focus group interviews and also critical reflection assignment, the researcher coded the developed understanding of this concept from the question below: "Can you explain to me what equality means to you and how would you implement equality in a class of diverse learners?"

Equality means treating everybody equal. I don't see differences in people, color, ethnicity, etc. because are all equal. My parents raised me as a Christian and I see everybody the same. We are all equal human being and before God since we are created in his image and likeness. In my class, I will treat all students equally at all costs.

This was a typical reply I got in the beginning of this research. According to Santamaria (2009) and Banks (2019), this is color blindness, which was very common. However, by the end of the research, I asked the same students the same question and this is what one participant said:

Equality is the state or quality of being treated with fairness or given the same opportunity despite one's socioeconomic background, race, ethnicity, or other difference. This is one of the ideals of our democratic society. It is through this that we recognize that historically certain groups in our society have experienced and are still experiencing discrimination due to race, sex, disability, sexual orientation etc. My role in my class is to come to terms to my biases and privileges and fight for these ideas for my students all the time.

For me, these statements reveal how candidates transformed their vision and conception of social justice. They came to embrace the significance and urgency of creating equitable, empowering, and humanizing learning contexts for all students especially those from the underrepresented backgrounds. Furthermore, candidates seemed to know that equality means being cognizant of the unconscious biases which can be stumbling blocks to increasing accessibility and inclusivity in the classroom (Sleeter,2013).

3) The third category from this prompt was diversity.

During the early stages of this study, candidates' responses to their understanding of diversity were also vague and lacked substance (emerging stage). However, eventually data analysis spread all over from field notes to their artifacts and interviews showed a progression to greater understanding (developing to enacting).

I also included this prompt in their cultural autobiography assignment and field notes, "What is your understanding of diversity and tell me your life experiences with diversity at this point? One student had this point which summarized the general outlook for all:

> For me diversity means accepting the differences. I have always seen people as individuals and accept who they are. I have friends from all races and we are all fine with each other. And I will use this experience in my education and later as a teacher.

And close to the end of the study, this was the response to the same question:

> Diversity for me means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. Yes, I may have experienced diversity before but my conceptual repertoires have changed after this course. Diversity for me is not only acceptance and respecting of individual differences, inclusion of different types of people but collection of thoughts, ideas, images, and beliefs systems that teachers build to more deeply including its multiple relationships to teaching and learning. My field experience enhanced my deep understanding when I interacted with all differences above. Due to this, I will add here that diversity requires transformative approach of teaching (thinking) and social action approach (action).

Another candidate had this to say:

> When I was beginning this course, I thought diversity for me only meant accepting the differences. I was a little bit naive to say that I see people as individuals and accept who they are. I thought by having friends from all races was enough and I could use this experience in my education and later as a teacher. But now, this program provided me with a richer meaning and worldview. Diversity for me means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. Yes, I may have experienced diversity before but my conceptual repertoires have changed after this course. Diversity for me

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This implies that candidates conceptualized diversity in a new transformed way. Thus, diversity represents the existence of variations of different characteristics in a group of people. And these characteristics could be everything that make us unique, such as cognitive skills and personality traits, along with the things that shape individual's identity (e.g. race, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, cultural background, social economic class, etc.).

4) Another concept I observed in data analysis was identity (self-knowledge) and Self efficacy (confidence).

As explored in the literature review, we teachers teach who we are and hence candidates need a positive sense of their own identity in order to thrive. Teachers with a strong identity formation have a high self-efficacy, which in turn is highly effective in class. A cursory review of all data revealed changes candidates went through in this study. For example, during both critical reflection assignment and also focus group interviews, I asked this question "Teachers teach who they are (self-knowledge) and what they have. To what extent do you feel confident about teaching a diverse class and applying social justice principles?" This was the reply from a focus group which generally reflects all candidates earlier in this study.

We know ourselves as White, middle class teacher candidates in our junior year. We do have knowledge about diversity but after participant observing a couple of times (field work), we don't feel confident teaching a diverse class, not alone applying social justice principles.

Later in the year, this was the reply:

Identity (self-knowledge) is complicated, a thing we did not know well before this class. It involves knowing ourselves very well, our preconceived notions about race, ethnicity, gender etc. Above all, it involves negotiating three identities- that we bring in to teacher education; those they develop while doing university course work; and those they develop when doing field experiences. At this point, we feel good where we are. We at least know our strengths and weaknesses. And we feel better than before about our confidence to teach diverse students and applying social justice principles.

The academic importance of having candidates draw on their lived experiences and make connections with field work seemed to benefit a lot. Findings here suggest that they deepened their self-knowledge and became more confident in their abilities. They had more information about subjective tendencies, such as our emotional state, personality traits, and behavioral patterns which was crucial to their career to be culturally relevant in teaching and curricular decisions.

5) The final category refers to professional responsibility—upholding the required standards of caring for all students in the classroom regardless of race, ethnicity, linguistic heritage, or cultural differences (Zeichner, 2009).

The bone of contention was to find out how the candidates were gradually growing, thinking, and reflecting about taking up responsibilities as a teacher today. The following questions were provided as a written assignment at the beginning and at the end of the project. "Describe your teaching philosophy? And to what extent have you grown in your critical consciousness and activism on the principles of social justice?" The following was a brief abstract from one candidate which generally reflects all of them:

My teaching philosophy is that a teacher must have a good understanding of the concepts, and students must be able to state and apply the concept. And for the second question, I am not sure what critical consciousness and social justice principles mean. I guess social justice means to act fairly but not sure of the principles involved. And am not sure what to anticipate these in my class. However, our generation today is more open minded.

And this was the last reflection toward the end of the study:

My teaching philosophy is that of being a constructivist. That means my role is to facilitate, guide, and provide access to information rather than acting as the primary source of information. Additionally, for students to construct knowledge, I believe that they need to have the opportunity to discover for themselves and practice skills in authentic situations. That means, providing them access to hands-on activities and allowing adequate time and space to use materials that reinforce the lesson being studied creates an opportunity for diverse individual discovery and construction of knowledge to occur. Critical to this is being a reflective practitioner which propels me to address the inequitable distribution of power and access to educational opportunities and attend to underlying social privileges. As for the second question, I feel good about my growth toward critical consciousness and principles of social justice. I am aware of my own assumptions and biases through critical reflection. I am aware that inequality not only exists, but is deeply structured into society in ways that secure its reproduction. And the categories of difference (such as gender, race, and class) rather than merit alone, do matter and contribute significantly to people's experiences and life opportunities. Therefore, my vocation as a teacher is to be a transformative agent of change by fighting for those weak and oppressed for so long in our society throughout history.

Evidently, this finding reveals how much transformation took place from the candidates from not being sure of what critical consciousness and social justice mean to being articulate constructivist candidates. Additionally, candidates developed a noticeable degree of confidence in articulating their teaching philosophy. They knew that philosophy enhances their willingness to be critical minded and reflective practitioners who can change in response to the feedback from students and peers, and their future ideas and goals for teaching and learning effectiveness.

To sum up, diversity and social justice involve critical analysis of the systems and power structures in place and acknowledge the generative involvement of students' voices in class in the development of instructions and assessment practices (DiAngelo and Sensoy, 2012). In this way,

they embody a paradigm shift that promote one's cultural identity and strengths as part of their learning as candidates to be an agent of change for the underrepresented students. Nevertheless, candidates in this study strongly reflected transformation in their visions of diversity and social justice. Their responses expressed growth in understanding of equality as a quality of being treated with fairness, knowledge of diversity which encompasses acknowledging, accepting individual differences and inclusion of different types of people including the collection of thoughts, ideas and belief systems. Additionally, apart from the importance of self-knowledge and self-confidence, having a good grasp of one's teaching philosophy has proved outstandingly transformative. Candidates recognized the importance of thinking more critically and their ability to deal rationally with issues of value and ethical responsibility in their future career.

Changes in Candidates' Reflective and Critical Thinking

The data confirmed candidates' development and growth in an explorative mindset and critical thinking about problems and solutions. They developed a noticeable degree of confidence in their ability to think like culturally responsive teachers. For example, after an experience in a classroom where the teaching was not culturally responsive, one candidate reflected,

> I think it was an eye-opening for me to realize how little other teachers try to level the playing field for all students. The student who was different felt alienated from the rest. It was awkward! That made me feel very confident in my new acquired skills.

And another student said, "It is really amazing how I feel liberated and transformed after knowing these principles of social justice. There is no doubt now that my conviction and awareness of professional sensitivity to cultural differences and learning styles will guide my practice." For these future educators, the opportunities the class provided to do critical thinking helped them see their prejudices and act accordingly. They recognized the importance of continually revisiting their knowledge of the self and reflecting on their professional sensitivity to cultural differences and learning styles. Some embraced the role of teacher as a transformative agent who takes a very active role in helping their students' challenge status quo thinking and act on social justice issues.

New Realization in How They Defined the Role of a Teacher

This experience provided an opportunity for candidates to reshape their vision by expanding their definition of the role of teacher. Data showed students shifting from what they perceived to be the focus of teaching which was to deliver content to a more of sociocultural and social emotional role. One candidate stated, "As a teacher, I have come to realize that the actual profession doesn't revolve around teaching as such, but also mentoring, parenting, advocating, building friendship, community building." Another candidate commented on how content can sometimes become secondary in teaching:

> In some situations, content is not the main focus of teaching. This is because, there are many other pressing needs and barriers to overcome. So as a teacher, I may end up spending much of my time and energy building strong relations, getting to know my students well so that what I teach reflects who they are and their environment. And this is why I have come to really like this course and the approaches taken.

Candidates realized that educators can promote social justice in the classroom by increasing students' awareness of social justice issues. It is a teacher's responsibility to provide a nurturing and welcoming learning environment for all her students, and to take seriously the position of influence they are in. They knew that they not only care about their students; they must understand how individuals fits into their community (Nieto, 2014). Additionally, candidates knew that they have an obligation to build a school system that promotes equality. This can be done using methods such as better tracking to find out what the economic makeup of students is. When schools collect more knowledge of the inequalities within their system, they're better equipped to deal with it. Tracking is also important when it comes to identifying struggling students at risk of dropping out. And finally, candidates knew that they can promote social justice by making sure to provide students with multiple perspectives and encouraging them to think beyond themselves. Bringing in current event stories and making history relevant to the present are both great ways for students to exercise their analytical thinking skills and expand their minds. Teachers should be cognizant of their own bias and be sure that the materials allow students to develop their own opinions. Outside the classroom, teachers should also commit to continuously researching and studying the best ways to incorporate social justice.

Discussion

The findings portray that this teacher preparation program was impactful in building the candidates' knowledge about culturally responsive teaching and social justice, and successful in developing their capacity to reflect on and practice social justice in a full-service school setting, which are important given the context of education today. When teacher education programs fail to prepare teachers who are capable of creating equitable learning environments for students of diverse ethnicities, cultures, and abilities, they inadvertently contribute to the problems of underachievement and school failure for at-risk populations. Gay (2018) reminds educators that ethnically diverse students deserve the same educational opportunities afforded to "middle-class, European American students—that is, the right to grapple with learning challenges from the point of strength and relevance found in their own cultural frames of reference" (p. 114). Because education in the US has not been very culturally responsive to students of color and ethnic diversity, these minority students are in double jeopardy because they have to master academic tasks while functioning under unfamiliar cultural expectations.

As is the case in many teacher education programs, 89% of the participants in this study were European American (Apple, 2019; Sleeter, 2013; Villegas, 2007). Lee (2011) points out that this ethnic demographic reality is not the problem. The problem is that White, middle-class teacher candidates like these have limited understanding about differences related to culture, class, and race. They often have resistant attitudes and few skills for working with diverse students. So, what can we point to in this setting and program that impacted the pre-service teachers' understanding of social justice and culturally responsive teaching?

First, the project was a broader one within a collaboration between a university and a full-service community school, wherein both of the partners were committed to finding new ways to meet the needs of the learners at the school. The school walls did not limit the support for students as community members and local organizations were vitally involved in the academic and social learning of the students. The university instructors also "walked the talk" in this case by being engaged in social action and caring relationships with students and teachers at the school.

Second, the course and field experience combination was intentional for the interns to connect theory and practice (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The course assignments and discussions were carefully orchestrated with the clinical curriculum so the interns could see and practice what they were learning. Their explorations of the community and its support for the school contextualized their classroom experiences. They learned specifically about the culture of the students in the school and used this knowledge to challenge assumptions and make comparisons. They did not have to imagine diversity in some abstract way. They were immersed in diversity and given strategies for reflecting on what it meant about good teaching and learning.

Finally, it bears mention that even though the impact of the cultural diversity and social justice curriculum was observable and triangulated by numerous different data sets in this study, what changed in the candidates' knowledge and attitudes was only a scratch on the surface of an incredibly complex developmental understanding which has to be revisited and continually re-enacted with each new context and group of students. These constructs need to be carried on as threads throughout the rest of the teacher education program and in the diverse educational communities where these new teachers take their first teaching jobs. Their decisions and actions in the classroom will have huge consequences for the next generation of learners.

Conclusion

In context of the deep concern about poor and uneven learning in our nation's schools, there is an urgent need to build a system in teacher education programs that can reliably prepare teachers who are committed to social justice, culturally fluency, critical thinkers, and confident in their abilities (Sleeter, 2013). This study provides many possibilities for such outcomes. Worth noting is that although 89% of participants were White and middle class, which is similar to our national teacher education work force, it was not surprising that they were not able to name unearned privileges and deconstruct their experiences at the beginning of this study. Eventually, candidates came to develop deeper consciousness. They were able to name their association with not only privileges, but social class, race, gender, nationality, creed, etc., which is a crucial step to fighting systemic iniquities and hegemonic tendencies as teachers of today. Teacher education and its curriculum must unveil the myths of meritocracy and conceptualize that social justice is the center of our public education system which must be defended at all costs. The course and field experience combination in this case made it possible for candidates to connect theory and practice (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The course assignments and discussions were carefully orchestrated with the clinical curriculum so candidates could see and practice what they were learning. No wonder, then, that transformative change became more evident. To conclude, I reaffirm the assertion that diversity and social justice in teacher education today is possible if there is a will, intentionality, and concerted effort to do so.

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