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Border Pedagogy: A Study of Preservice Teacher Transformation

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Abstract

In our increasingly interconnected global society, learning to think about ourselves in a border context, making crossings and connections, reflecting on our position and power, and articulating a vision of social justice are necessary civic skills. Developing educational border crossers who have moved beyond stereotyping and the tourist's gaze to have a sensibility for social justice can enrich public life and stimulate the deepest forms of civic engagement. This study examines a teacher education program's nascent efforts to develop multicultural competencies, specifically border pedagogy, in future teachers.

The geopolitical border between Mexico and the United States represents the beginnings, endings, and blending of languages, cultures, communities, and countries. It also reflects the complexity, juxtaposition, and intersection of identities, economies, and social and educational issues. K–12 students, particularly in border regions, represent families that are voluntary immigrants as well as involuntary minorities (Ogbu and Gibson 1991; Trueba 1993). According to Huntington (2004, 1), there is a distinctly strong sentiment against those who cross the Mexican-U.S. border.

> *The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream. The United States ignores this challenge at its peril.*

Such sentiment does not develop in a vacuum. Scholars, textbooks, and media from advertisements to television news promote a national chauvinism and parochialism that divides rather than joins border communities (Giroux and McLaren 1994). Though the authors believe that Huntington's (2004) view misrepresents the integration and complexity around the Mexican-U.S. border, even in border communities such as San Diego, which is located minutes away from Tijuana, Mexico, the curriculum and language used are focused on European-American students from middle-class families, promoting conformity to dominant cultural codes and practices (Giroux and McLaren 1994; Romo and Roseman 2004). Subsequently, issues of racial identity, development, language acquisition, socioeconomic status, and cultural competency often collide when increasingly diverse K–12 student bodies meet with predominantly monocultural teachers, curriculum, and pedagogy.

A positive pedagogical approach to border pedagogy has not been defined in educational policy or teacher preparation programs. However, theorists in cultural studies and composition have used negotiation for describing how people might work, live, learn, and teach within a socioculturally complex region, such as a border region. In other words, knowledge and culture are not static, pure, or congealed. In fact, the fluidity of the border region challenges educators to rethink linguistic, social, theoretical, and geopolitical boundaries (Hernandez 1997).

Most discussions of border pedagogy have been confined to higher education and theoretical paradigms. These discussions have criticized traditional teaching and learning approaches and offered positive alternatives, such as the politics of difference literature (comparing male/female, white/black, west/east), as a way to understand sociocultural domination (Cook 2000). Consequently, educational criticism has been isolated in classrooms and journals so that it has had little impact on culture or organization.

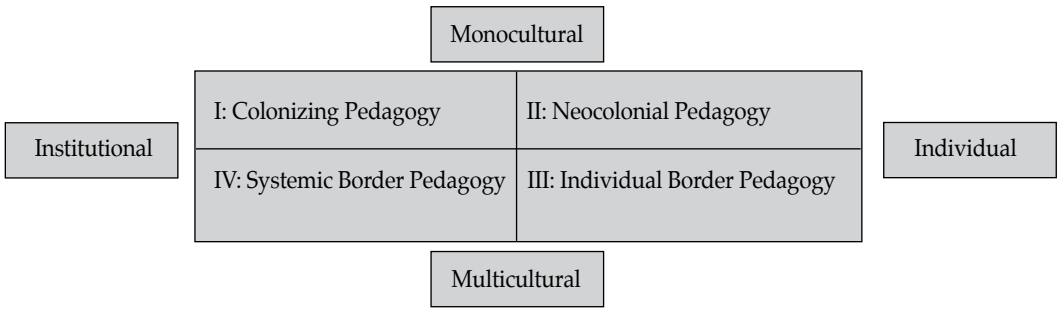
As Giroux (1991, 28) noted, border pedagogy works to "further create borderlands in which the diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power." Border pedagogy also embodies integration and cultural generation. At a K–12 level, border pedagogy teaches the skills of critical thinking, debating power, meaning, and identity. Border pedagogy encourages tolerance, ethical sophistication, and openness. In short, border pedagogy works to decolonize and revitalize learning and teaching to promote liberty and justice for all. Border pedagogy particularly engages K–12 students in multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences, and languages to help them construct their own narratives and histories, and revise democracy through sociocultural negotiation.

This article examines an education program's efforts to develop multicultural competencies, specifically border pedagogy, in future teachers. The authors' study examined two questions: How are future teacher candidates, who are monocultural, effectively prepared to teach in a border context, and what are the important characteristics of border pedagogy teachers?

Discussion of Cultural Democracy Quadrants and Border Pedagogy

Cultural democracy is the process and product of implementing democracy in a multicultural society (Romo and Roseman 2004). A framework for cultural democracy practices (see Figure 1) examines institutional or group cultures, such as K–12 schools and classrooms. The framework is contextualized by a continuum that goes from exclusively monocultural to inclusively multicultural, and from individual to systemic. The framework reads in a clockwise direction from exclusively monocultural (quadrant I) to inclusively multicultural (quadrant IV).

Figure 1: Framework for Cultural Democracy Practices



Quadrant I descriptors include hostility toward those perceived as outsiders; explicit exclusion; and monoculturally embedded traits that are reinforced at individual, group, and institutional levels. In K–12 teaching practices, an example would be educators who are teaching to control and students who are learning to survive. In Quadrant I, teaching is talking, and learning is listening. Students' voices are squashed in this setting, devoid of social justice rhetoric. Teachers are rooted in perpetuating, either consciously or unconsciously, the status quo (Romo and Roseman 2004).

Quadrant II descriptors are less overtly hostile than those in Quadrant I, but include exclusion via second-generation discrimination; individual representatives of minority groups reporting pioneer experiences; and monocultural values reflected implicitly via individual and group reinforcement, industrial paradigm, and status quo. In this quadrant, in a K–12 educational setting, neocolonial pedagogy is used: Teachers teach to the test and students learn to fit in.

Quadrants III and IV most closely relate to border pedagogy as discussed in this article. Descriptors for Quadrant III include welcoming on the surface; diversity practiced primarily as contributions; symbolic differences; and cultural responsiveness demonstrated as awareness and sensitivity, yielding incremental reform and symbolic inclusion of those perceived as different from the dominant group.

Quadrant III practices are related to culturally responsive teaching or multicultural educational goals, such as the theory of cultural pluralism; ideals of social justice and the end of racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and discrimination; affirmations of culture in the teaching and learning process; and visions of educational equity and high

levels of academic learning for all youth (Bennet 2001). These practices are related to critical pedagogy, which begins with an understanding that knowledge is contextual. Critical pedagogy (Darder 2002, 25) encourages teachers to unveil "class bound values inherent in education materials, classroom practices, and public policy, through dialogue and study." Such practices resist sociocultural conservatives' insistence on a common culture that promotes deep structural inequalities and forms of domination that characterize relationships between privileged and subordinate groups (Giroux 1991).

Quadrant IV descriptors include local cultural democracy as a result of transformational organizational change at individual, group, and institutional levels; culture reflective of post-industrial values—partnership versus power-over; and schools embodying transformational, social action-oriented curriculum and instruction. Quadrant IV teaching and learning are most congruent with border pedagogy and offer insights into its process and outcomes.

Methodology

Traditional research related to teacher preparation or professional development has not adequately addressed teachers as agents of social justice (Blea 1995; Darder 1994). Though quantitative methodology tends to be better at prediction, control, description, confirmation, and hypothesis testing (Metz 2000), qualitative methodology is preferred for generating understanding, description, discovery, and hypotheses. A qualitative research methodology was used in this study to investigate the experiences of preservice educators as they examined and reconstructed their personal and professional identities in border communities. In other words, this study focused on better understanding what transformative teachers experienced and the contexts surrounding their experiences, rather than simply reporting what they did (Metz 2000).

The study participants were 48 undergraduate and graduate students, who were predominantly European-American, female preservice teachers. The data were gathered from integrative essays that participants wrote at the end of the course "Philosophical and Multicultural Foundations of Education." Each essay incorporated reflections about personal multicultural competency. The pedagogy that the students experienced in class was eclectic, favoring experiential learning such as simulations, experience-based learning activities that clarified their own and others' lack of privilege, and videos that introduced taboo racial and equity-related topics. These evoked visceral responses in the students, who were guided to reflect on their own developmental process with the aid of theoretical frameworks. This method is congruent with Quadrant III and IV practices (Romo and Roseman 2004).

The data highlighted the significance of university classroom border pedagogy practices, such as readings that helped them to explicitly examine their own class and racial privilege; simulations that raised issues of responding to change, such as culture shock; and videos that introduced issues related to the politics of education that previously were not considered by the students. Classroom learning was amplified in Community Service Learning (CSL) placements, where preservice teachers interacted with students and families whose culture and life experiences were different from their own.

During the semester, preservice teachers were required to serve ten hours in a university-supported CSL program to gain exposure to alternative educational resources and programs. The placement sites were a family shelter, a school for homeless youth, a Sudanese community resource center, and a bilingual (Spanish-English) charter school. These sites exposed preservice teachers to clientele from various races, ethnicities, nationalities, and experiences from which they had been sheltered in their prior education. The placement sites were within a few miles of the university, which underscored the relevance of border pedagogy in a broader border region, not just in communities at the geopolitical border.

One way to gain understanding is to examine the school performance of students who do not have access to the power or privilege of the U.S. dominant culture.

The narrative process was chosen so that researchers could gain a greater cultural and professional understanding of teachers' everyday experiences. The open-ended questions allowed participants to tell their own stories about experiences in cultural, social, and institutional contexts. To form the analysis, the authors reviewed the narratives separately and then discussed, coded, and interpreted the analysis.

Presentation of Data

The data showed that students were underprepared to deal with the complexities of border regions and to function as effective teachers in those diverse areas. For many preservice teachers, this was their first exposure to multicultural professional development. The ongoing juxtaposition of classroom discussion and theory with the experiential learning in the CSL sites helped participants reconstruct and embrace their renewed professional identities and work effectively in diverse settings, particularly in the sociopolitical San Diego-Tijuana border region. The data suggested that teachers must be fluent in the hidden dynamics that affect schools: immigration, poverty, race, culture, and language.

Immigration

Over the past several decades, immigration patterns have changed dramatically. The wave of immigrants from Europe has diminished, and increasing numbers are coming to the United States from Korea, Vietnam, China, India, the Philippines, Somalia, Laos, Mexico, and Central America—areas in which the dominant culture is more collective. That is, family and community are placed before the individual, people are more cooperative than competitive, and there is a more hierarchical social structure (National Center for Education Statistics 2004). By the turn of the century, according to the 2000 United States Census, an estimated 40 percent of all school children will be considered limited-English proficient (LEP) and will be living in non-English language homes. The United States has approximately 30 million Latinos, making it the fifth largest Hispanic country in the world (Pew Hispanic Center 2005).

Teachers, the majority of whom have ancestral roots in Europe, often are surprised when they hear of discrimination and exclusionary issues facing recent immigrants (Nieto 1999). Unfortunately, immigrant issues are virtually invisible to them, and Huntington's proposal that immigrants just should become Americans appears to guide legislation. A growing number of states are passing legislation that impacts immigrants (Lacey 2004; Crawford 2000). In 1994, California voters passed Proposition 187, denying illegal immigrants access to education. Subsequently, the federal district courts decreed that the proposition violated the 1982 U.S. Supreme Court decision in Plyler vs. Doe, 457 U.S. 202—a case which allowed undocumented, illegal residents of the United States the right to receive free public K–12 education. Though legislative changes are forthcoming, immigrant students are generally overlooked and underserved (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, and Clewell 2000) at the classroom and institutional levels in pre-K–12 schools (Romo, Bradfield, and Serrano 2004).

The following data illustrate preservice students' feelings of transformation by learning about and forming relationships with immigrant students. One student described how he moved from ignorance about the community to having his eyes opened and becoming allies with immigrant students and families.

> *In everyday life, it is so easy for me to become friends with people who are similar to me because I see them at social functions, they look like me . . . we are similar. At first, I felt ashamed by how little I knew about the country of Sudan and the Sudanese people. I didn't know about the oppression and war that has occurred and continues. I didn't realize the lifestyle changes that people have to make to live in the United States.*

> *In an attempt to become a multicultural competent advocate for all children, all members of the education program, including myself, have embarked on a challenging journey. This journey, or process, has and continues to feature community service learning, practicum experience, and multicultural study. Thus far, it has been an incredible challenge and has already redefined my concept of advocacy in education.*

The preservice teachers' experiences in the CSL settings also impacted the ways these students analyzed curriculum and instructional strategies. One preservice teacher, who was enrolled concurrently in a methods course that required 50 hours of practicum at a school where Sudanese students sat through culturally irrelevant lessons, shared:

> *Here, first- and second-generation Americans, the majority of whom are Sudanese refugees, come together in the collective aspiration to succeed in a new environment. An example I noticed was an assignment focusing on the southern colonies. The emphasis rested on geographical attributes that each region held, and the impact of these attributes on production. The student I was helping could not even come close to visualizing the varying environments. It is the teacher's job to make these far-off realities attainable for the student by relating them to existing dynamics that are more accessible to the cultural groups present in the classroom.*

As these preservice teachers integrated classroom theory and discussions with their CSL experience, they realized that they previously did not care about situations that had little to do with their own world. However, after they built relationships with people that were directly affected by anti-immigrant sentiment and who might be struggling in the U.S. educational system, they learned about the importance of meeting individual needs in a classroom. This transformation led these preservice teachers to aspire to become advocates.

Poverty

Across the nation, a growing number of children are born into poverty. They enter kindergarten with hopes and dreams of opportunity and progress. Unfortunately, by the time most of these children leave school, many of their hopes have withered. Education in the United States is about social class. According to McLaren (1994, 180), the social class of the poor, or the underclass, consists of "black, Hispanic, and Asian class factions, together with the white aged, the unemployed and underemployed, a large section of women, the handicapped, and other marginalized economic groups." In the United States, the underclass continues to increase, while access to the privileges held by the middle- and upper-class diminishes. Despite the myth of meritocracy, which maintains that a solid work ethic is all one needs to pull oneself up by the bootstraps, the U.S. middle class is diminishing, the upper class remains relatively static, and the underclass is growing. About 25 percent of U.S. children live in poverty, and that percentage continues to increase (Children's Defense Fund 2005; Romo, Bradfield, and Serrano 2004).

Through CSL, students became aware of other experiences, not by going to another country, but by engaging in their immediate surroundings—a close and nearby world. As a result, preservice teachers examined their privilege and transformed their previously unexamined understanding of curriculum. One preservice teacher, a middle-class, European-American woman, described her sense of guilt after working with 13-year-old students.

> *We finished the homework, and then I left. The second I got into the car, I began to cry. It was very evident that all the kids did not have a lot of money. I felt really bad, and there was that huge layer of guilt hanging over me. So I decided, from that point on, I would always bring something with me, even if it were just something small. I love to see the kids look so excited, and they seem to really appreciate everything I do for them. Over the past eight or nine weeks, I have become really attached to these kids.*

A preservice teacher who had more experience with poverty focused on K–12 students' academic needs rather than on her feelings of guilt.

> *Many students cannot afford special classes like the ones offered in Sylvan Learning Centers or Kaplan, so I brought them the program. The next two times that I attend the community service learning site, I am going to give a presentation on the importance of studying abroad during college. Also, I am going to have them write a letter to out-of-state universities so they can get exposure to educational opportunities outside of their world.*

For some preservice teachers, this was the first time they realized what it felt like to be a minority. This experience helped them to realize that they were raised with many economic advantages compared to the students with whom they were engaging. Their narratives illustrated profound learning about future teachers' responsibilities to examine systemic educational implications of poverty and to go beyond teaching a particular content or prescribed curriculum.

Race and Culture

> *Those with power are frequently least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence (Delpit 1995, 26).*

Power and privilege are unequivocally intertwined with race in U.S. society. Power, inequitably distributed, is represented by time, territory, and task. Who gets the time and attention? Who sets the schedule, and whose schedule counts? Who dominates our lives in positions and organizations? Who's an insider? Who determines what's important for us to do, value, or compare to as a measure of our worth? Power and privilege intersect race and gender, the balance of which falls into the hands of European-American males. Teachers must understand this intersection to provide a more equitable education for students outside the circle of power. One way to gain understanding is to examine the school performance of students who do not have access to the power or privilege of the U.S. dominant culture.

The dropout rates across the nation for Hispanics/Latinos, African Americans, and American Indians are particularly high (Romo, Bradfield, and Serrano 2004) when compared to European-American students. In the United States, dropout rates for Latinos and American Indians hover between 40 and 50 percent, almost double that for African Americans and triple that for European Americans (Children's Defense Fund 2005; Pew Hispanic Center 2005).

The problem becomes even more dramatic when the racial mix of teachers to students is examined. Though the teaching force is approximately 93 percent European American, people of color comprise more than 50 percent of the population in states such as Arizona, Florida, California, and Texas (United States Census Bureau 2000). Unfortunately, most teachers are likely to ask more complex questions of, provide more praise, use a wider variety of strategies, provide more opportunities to learn, and positively evaluate students whose culture and first language are most like their own. In short, monocultural teachers have the most success with students who are most like themselves (Stanton-Salazar 1997; Romo, Bradfield, and Serrano 2004).

The CSL placements prompted these preservice teachers to develop understanding about racial and ethnic identity. One preservice teacher described her discovery that race is a dynamic which impacts effectiveness in the classroom.

> *I noticed, on the first day that I began my volunteer service at this school, how many of the children were intimidated by me. It took me a little while (and a short conversation with a few of the teachers) to realize that they feared, as well as looked up to me, because I am 'white.'*

A key factor in these preservice teachers' professional development was their ability to correlate field experiences, university experiential learning, and personal development with theoretical frameworks. One preservice teacher reflected on developing relationships with K–12 students from various ethnic and racial backgrounds.

> *I still can remember the real sense of fear that I had toward these students as I entered the third-grade classroom for the first time. It took me by surprise that I was actually frightened of the small children. I thought about this sense of fear and paralleled it directly to the insights of Tatum's article 'Talking about Race' (1992). I remember the direct sense of fear I had while reading the article, which helped me to overcome my own sense of selfish pride. It allowed me to know that we all have racism and preconceived judgments; yet, by confronting them, we can learn to overcome ignorant stereotypes.*

One preservice teacher explained how she moved beyond initial cultural incompetence to reconstruct her own identities and become more culturally relevant.

> *By learning about the different stages of Helms's (Tatum 1992) model of White Racial Identity Development, I have come to understand that my earlier neglect of obvious racism in the U.S. was normal. But through experiences like service learning, I am slowly moving through the stages to become a more multicultural competent human being.*

Another preservice teacher described her personal growth.

> *Though I had grown up being open to different cultures, there were just three cultures that I was surrounded with from day one. Now, I had to prepare myself to learn and accept about ten new cultures that I knew nothing about. I don't think I would have been able to do it on my own. But through my experiences with the South Sudan center, being a teaching assistant in numerous different classroom settings, and through class lectures, videos, and conversations, I found a way to start.*

Language

By the end of 2003, 25 percent of the students in California public schools were living in non-English speaking homes (California Department of Education 2005). Despite research demonstrating that students learn a second language best when they build academically upon their first language, California bilingual education programs and teacher training were undermined in 1998 by Proposition 227 (Katz and Kohl 2002). This type of legislation means that new teachers will not be equipped to understand the majority of their students linguistically, culturally, or academically.

Wittingly or unwittingly, schools act as transmitters and preservers of the dominant culture, even in schools where the majority of students are not European American. Schools are places that require conformity rather than places of opportunity and access. Not surprisingly, the data from this study showed that monolingual preservice teachers experienced frustration in classrooms with second-language learners because they did not have the linguistic ability to understand the students. Of particular interest, however, were two bilingual preservice teachers who carried the knowledge, dispositions, and skills of linguistic colonialism. One wrote:

When I went over to help student B, I noticed that she was writing in Spanish. This alarmed me. I told her in English, 'I think you need to write this in English.' Her classmate then intruded and said, 'Mrs. _____ lets us write in Spanish if we want. Student B doesn't speak English well, so she can.' I was amazed that the instructor allowed the use of another language in the writing journal, yet shocked that the other students did not take up the offer and, instead, continued to write in English.

As a substitute teacher, I have mistakenly imposed my biased values and beliefs onto students. I have even said to the students, 'I do not want to hear anyone talking in Spanish in this class, because I want you to learn English. If I hear anyone not trying, and talking to me in Spanish, you will write a disciplinary essay.' It became clear that imposing my prejudices upon the students is not the correct thing to do. Yet, it can be easy to do if one is not exposed to multicultural-oriented activities that provide the educator with cultural awareness and sensitivity to differences.

Discussion

The data suggested that a process and a product of border pedagogy are needed to respond to the study question: How are future teacher candidates, who are monocultural, effectively prepared to teach in a border context? Preservice teachers need cognitive preparation and external motivation to engage in unfamiliar settings. At the beginning of the study, many preservice teachers were motivated by their required participation in unfamiliar neighborhood educational settings. Many were afraid of what they did not know. Over time, the preservice teachers demonstrated a transformation of their knowledge base, dispositions, and skills to function as multiculturally competent advocates for all students. This shift began with university classroom supports to help these preservice teachers see and contextualize their educational experiences. Experiential learning activities reinforced class content and helped them gain a better understanding of themselves, their students, and teaching in a border region.

Most teachers are likely to ask more complex questions of, provide more praise, use a wider variety of strategies, provide more opportunities to learn, and positively evaluate students whose culture and first language are most like their own.

The data also provided insights into the study question: What are some important characteristics of border pedagogy teachers? When preservice teachers had gained a border pedagogy knowledge base, they began to consider curriculum in sociopolitical terms and to see complexities of identity—such as class, national origin, language, race, and culture—in a border region. These border pedagogy teachers began to see racism, sexism, classism, and discrimination in relation to their own class, background, and biased epistemology. They began to understand their own and students' racial and cultural identity frameworks and cognitive background. They also began to recognize the sociopolitical influences on immigra-

tion, mono- and multicultural curriculum and learning environments, and class and privilege issues in teaching and learning.

When border pedagogy educators reflect on their experiences and knowledge base, they appear to develop dispositions that support a strong sense of personal identity as teachers, learners, family members, and community members. They value communications, take students' success personally, stress student-centered curriculum and student voice, and hold an attitude of advocacy. They realize their own identities as members of a team or learning community. They value learning about their students' families. They espouse open-mindedness and acceptance, the value of personal transformation, an appreciation of multicultural education, a willingness to challenge their own beliefs, a belief that all students can succeed, and the value of self-reflection.

Border pedagogy educators demonstrate and develop their knowledge and dispositions by helping students solve problems, expanding cultural backgrounds, and showing caring and trust. They adapt curriculum to students, bring nonstandard resources to teaching and learning, and apply life experiences to learning. They understand individual and group motivations and behaviors, and they use this knowledge to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

Conclusions

Some pundits see international borders as geopolitical walls to keep people and institutions separate. The reality, however, is that sociopolitical zones around geopolitical borders are fluid and connecting. The method of teaching and learning described here (mixing theory and practice) endeavored to teach the skills of critical thinking by debating power, meaning, and identity. Border pedagogy encourages tolerance, ethical sophistication, and openness, and works to decolonize and revitalize learning and teaching to promote liberty and justice for all. Border pedagogy is a practice that enables classroom teachers and students to view education as a political, social, and cultural enterprise (Giroux 1988).

When border pedagogy educators reflect on their experiences and knowledge base, they appear to develop dispositions that support a strong sense of personal identity as teachers, learners, family members, and community members.

This study has implications for educators in general. Students and teachers must be skilled in negotiation, language, immigration, race, culture, and class issues. The

study also suggests that common diversity issues may be significant to how students and teachers work with individuals from other sides of social or geopolitical borders with which they deal. Future studies should involve exchanges between educators from both sides of international borders to explore their respective practices and their congruence with border pedagogy.

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