Critical Pedagogy and Teacher Education:
Radicalizing Prospective Teachers

By Lilia I. Bartolomé

The task of successfully preparing teachers in the United State to effectively work with an ever-increasing culturally and linguistically diverse student body represents a pressing challenge for teacher educators. Unfortunately, much of this practice of equipping prospective teachers for working with learners from different backgrounds revolves around exposing these future educators to what are perceived as the best practical strategies to ensure the academic and linguistic development of their students. Gaining access to and actively creating methods and materials for the classroom is certainly an important step towards effective teaching. However, this practical focus far too often occurs without examining teachers' own assumptions, values, and beliefs and how this ideological posture informs, often unconsciously, their perceptions and actions when working with linguistic-minority and other politically, socially, and economically subordinated students.

"Ideology" is used here to refer to the framework of thought constructed and held by members of a society to justify or rationalize an existing social order. As Antonia Darder, Rodolfo Torres and Marta Baltodano (2002) point out, what is important is

> that ideology be understood as existing at the deep, embedded psychological structures of the personal ity. Ideology more often than not manifests itself in the inner histories and experiences that give rise

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> to questions of subjectivity as they are constructed by individual needs, drives, and passions, as well as the changing material conditions and social foundations of a society. (p. 13)

In this paper, I discuss the importance of infusing teacher education curricula with critical pedagogical principles in order to prepare educators to aggressively name and interrogate potentially harmful ideologies and practices in the schools and classrooms where they work. I maintain that teachers need to develop political and ideological clarity in order to increase the chances of academic success for all students. I also argue that it is imperative that these educators instill in their students in K-12 public schools the same kind of critical consciousness that enables them to read and act upon the world around them.

"Political clarity" refers to the ongoing process by which individuals achieve ever-deepening consciousness of the sociopolitical and economic realities that shape their lives and their capacity to transform such material and symbolic conditions. It also refers to the process by which individuals come to understand the possible linkages between macro-level political, economic, and social variables and subordinated groups' academic performance in the micro-level classroom (Bartolomé, 1994). "Ideological clarity" refers to the process by which individuals struggle to identify and compare their own explanations for the existing socioeconomic and political hierarchy with the dominant society's. The juxtaposing of ideologies should help teachers to better understand if, when, and how their belief systems uncritically reflect those of the dominant society and thus maintain unequal and what should be unacceptable conditions that so many students experience on a daily basis (Bartolomé, 2000).

One effective way to ensure that pre-service teachers begin to develop and increase their political and ideological clarity is by having teacher education classrooms explicitly explore how ideology functions as it relates to power. It is also important for prospective teachers to examine the political and cultural role that counter-hegemonic resistance can serve to contest and transform the exclusionary, harmful, and fundamentally undemocratic values and beliefs that inform dominant educational practices in the United States. In what follows, I first explain why it is necessary for teacher educators to recognize, better understand, and challenge the ideological dimensions of prospective teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward subordinated students. Next, I share research results from my work at Riverview High School that illustrate the powerful potential of teachers' who critically understand the ideological and material obstacles faced by youth in schools, and their proactive responses as defenders of their students. Finally, I identify key critical pedagogical principles that, interwoven into teacher education coursework and field experiences, have the potential to help develop in prospective teachers, much like the teachers in my research study, the ability to assume counter-hegemonic stances so as to create a "more equal playing field" for all students.

Changing Demographics and the Clashing of Ideologies

The dramatic increase in low-income, non-White and linguistic-minority students in U.S. public schools signals the urgent need to understand and challenge the ideological orientations of prospective teachers in teacher education programs. One current challenge is to adequately prepare the overwhelmingly White, female, and middle-class pre-service teacher population to work with these students as they are quickly becoming the majority in many of the largest urban public schools in the country (Gomez, 1994). While the nation's school population is made up of approximately 40 percent minority children, nearly 90 percent of teachers are White (National Center for Education Statistics, 1992). In addition, the social class differences between teachers and students continue to grow. For example, 44 percent of African-American children and 36 percent of Latino children live in poverty, and yet increasingly teachers are coming from White lower-middle and middle-class homes and have been raised in rural and suburban communities (Zimpher, 1989). There are also significant differences in teacher-student language backgrounds. Despite the fact that by 1994 there were already approximately 5 to 7.5 million non-native English-speaking students in public schools around the country — a number that has continued to rise — the majority of teachers in the U.S. are monolingual English speakers.

Given the social class, racial, cultural, and language differences between teachers and students, and our society's historical predisposition to view culturally and linguistically diverse students through a deficit lens that positions them as less intelligent, talented, qualified, and deserving, it is especially urgent that educators critically understand their ideological orientations with respect to these differences, and begin to comprehend that teaching is not a politically or ideologically neutral undertaking. It is also important to acknowledge that minority academic underachievement and high 'drop out', suspension and expulsion rates cannot be addressed in primarily methodological and technical terms dislodged from the material, social, and ideological conditions that have shaped and sustained such failure rates.

What We Know about Teachers' Ideological Orientations

Increasing teachers' ideological awareness and clarity requires that educators compare and contrast their personal explanations of the wider social order with those propagated by the dominant society. Unfortunately, transforming educators' conscious and unconscious beliefs and attitudes regarding the legitimacy of the dominant social order and of the resulting unequal power relations among cultural groups at the school and classroom level has, by and large, historically not been acknowledged in mainstream teacher education programs as a significant step towards improving the educational processes for and outcomes of low-SES, non-White, and linguistic-minority students.

However more progressive literature on teacher education suggests that pro-

spective teachers, regardless of their ethnic background, tend to uncritically and often unconsciously hold beliefs and attitudes about the existing social order that reflect dominant ideologies that are harmful to so many students (Bloom, 1991; Davis, 1994; Freire, 1997, 1998a, 1998b; Gomez, 1994; Gonsalvez, 1996; Haberman, 1991; Macedo, 1994; Sleeter, 1992). Furthermore, these educators tend to see the social order as a fair and just one. John Farley (2000) explains that one dominant ideological belief — that Blacks and Latinos are responsible for their own disadvantages — "appears deeply rooted in an American ideology of individualism, a belief that each individual determines his or her own situation" (p. 66). When people believe that the system is fair, that is, that African Americans and Latinos have the same opportunity as White Americans, they will usually do two things: 1) they blame the minorities themselves for any disadvantages they experience rather than blaming White racism or other oppressive aspects of the system; and 2) they oppose policies designed to increase minority opportunities such as bilingual education and affirmative action.

Prospective and experienced educators alike often resent having to take courses that challenge some of the dominant ideologies they unconsciously hold (Gonsalvez, 1996). Interestingly enough, even when teachers recognize that certain minority groups have historically been economically worse off, have academically underachieved, and have higher mortality rates than Whites, their explanations for such inequalities are usually underdeveloped or nonexistent (Bartolomé, 1998; King, 1991).

Unfortunately, this lack of political and ideological clarity often translates into teachers uncritically accepting the status quo as "natural". It also leads educators down an assimilationist path to learning and teaching, rather than a culturally responsive, integrative, and transformative one, and perpetuates deficit-based views of low-SES, non-White, and linguistic-minority students. Educators who do not identify and interrogate their negative, racist, and classist ideological orientations often work to reproduce the existing social order (Bartolomé, 1998; Bloom, 1991). Even teachers who subscribe to the latest teaching methodologies and learning theories can unknowingly end up perverting and subverting their work because of unacknowledged and unexamined dysconscious racism (King, 1991) and other discriminatory tendencies.

Recent literature on effective teachers of minority students describes the teachers as caring, knowledgeable and skilled practitioners. The research also alludes to the teachers' ability to recognize the subordinate status accorded to low SES and non-White students and describes the teachers' efforts to validate the cultures and identities of children in school (Beauboeuf, 1997; Garcia, 1991; Howard, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nieto, 2000a, 2000b). However, much of this literature stops short of naming teachers' beliefs and attitudes as "ideology" and instead treats these dispositions as individually motivated and thus apolitical constructs.

In the section that follows, I share the results of a study I conducted with a

colleague (Bartolome & Balderrama, 2001) that captures how some teachers figure out that teaching is not an apolitical undertaking, develop a critical understanding of how asymmetrical power relations play out in schools, and devise strategies on their students' behalf for short-circuiting potential inequalities they may experience. Though the teachers studied vary in terms of their personal political orientations (they self-identified across the conservative-liberal spectrum) and the degree to which they engage in critical forms of education, these educators share some important counter-hegemonic beliefs to dominant oppressive practices, a strong sense of student advocacy, as well as a commitment to creating more just and humane schooling conditions for their students. In this paper, I not only describe their efforts, but I also work to expand them by offering critical pedagogical insights intended to compound and magnify their success.

The Study

Riverview High School

The educators interviewed for this research project all work at Riverview High School (pseudonyms have been used for the names of all participants and the school). This high school has been in existence for 100 years and is located in the coastal southern California community of Rancho Nacional, approximately 18 miles north of the Mexican boarder.

Riverside High School has an impressive academic track record over the past two decades. In 1994, Redbook Magazine recognized it as a "Best High School", and in 1996 the school was named a "California Distinguished School". In addition, approximately 70 percent of each graduating class attend either community or four-year colleges and receive millions of dollars in scholarship monies. Furthermore, past research on effective schools has included Riverview in its sample (for an example of this research, see Lucas, Henze & Donato, 1990).

Riverview High School is culturally and linguistically diverse. The student enrollment is 70 percent Mexicano/Latino, and 8 percent Filipino American. The descriptor "Mexicano/Latino" is used here because historically the Latino population in Riverside has been predominantly of Mexican ancestry. However, I also want to acknowledge those Latino students who may not be of Mexican ancestry. At the same time, the term "Mexicano" is utilized instead of the more common Mexican American or Chicano because a significant number of these students are first-generation Americans or recent immigrants. The rest of the student body is made up of smaller numbers of Whites, African Americans, and Pacific Islanders. In addition, 62 percent of all Riverview students come from homes where a language other than English is spoken (the majority being Spanish-speakers). According to school records, non-English and limited English proficient students comprise 23 percent of the current enrollment (Riverview High School Profile Information, 1996). The school offers regular and honors-level courses in bilingual (English/Spanish)

and sheltered instructional settings as well as bilingual counseling services (English, Spanish, and Tagalog) for students not proficient in English. The majority of Riverview students come from low-income homes that receive federal assistance and are thus eligible for free nutrition and lunch services.

The Four Exemplary Educators

Four Riverview High School educators, identified as exemplary by administrators and colleagues, were invited to discuss their experiences with Mexicano/Latino students (and other low SES, non-white, and linguistic-minority students) and how to effectively prepare them academically. The four educators ranged in experience (8 to 25 years) and consisted of: one White, female principal, Dr. Peabody; one Chicano, history teacher, Mr. Tijerina; one White, female English teacher, Mrs. Cortland; and one White, male math teacher, Mr. Broadbent. The educators were similar in age (mid to late 50s). Two of the teachers taught exclusively or primarily in English and Mr. Tijerina had experience in both English mainstream and English-Spanish classroom settings.

The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions intended to elicit teacher explanations and views about their own experiences with and beliefs about low-SES, non-White, and linguistic-minority students and factors related to educating them. In addition, my research associate and I asked these educators about their personal histories and the life journeys that led them to teaching. They were also asked to describe their personal school experiences as students as well as their experiences with non-White people growing up. Additionally, we asked them to discuss their teacher preparation experiences, their current teaching at Riverview, their conceptions of effective teaching, as well as their explanations for Riverview High's touted effectiveness.

Awareness of Asymmetrical Power Relations

The preliminary findings suggest that, in general, the educators interviewed attribute the academic and social success of their students to the school personnel's ability to create and sustain a caring, just and level playing field — a "comfort zone" as they call it — for learners who have historically not been treated well in educational institutions or in the greater society. The teachers, albeit to different degrees, question particular dominant ideologies such as meritocratic explanations of the existing social order, and they reject deficit views of their students. They also generally resist romanticized and White supremacist views of White, middle-class (mainstream) culture. In addition, the participants report having engaged in what I label as "cultural border crossing" where they personally experienced being positioned as low status, or witnessed someone else's subordination. The fourth and final finding of this study suggests that the educators see themselves as cultural brokers or advocates for their students and perceive this aspect of their work as key in helping their students figure out the school culture in order to succeed therein.

"There is no equal playing field" — Questioning Meritocratic Explanations of the Social Order

Across interviews, the educators questioned the validity of meritocracy — the myth that you get ahead simply by virtue of your hard work and talents — as well as the "meritocratic" explanation of the existing social order that works to justify why Mexicanos/Latinos and other minorities are at the "bottom" and Whites are on the "top" of the academic, socioeconomic, and political ladder. For example, Mr. Broadbent explained that Mexican-American academic failure could be partly countered if teachers somehow get their working-class students to see "how the other half lives" and question their "lot in life." He made the point that life is not fair and that those most capable, often because of working-class limitations, are not exposed to the outside world and, as a result, often do not feel confident enough to "grab for it." He pointed out that often such opportunities are not based on merit or ability, but rather on sheer luck. Mr. Broadbent shared that had his father not been moved up from enlisted man to officer, he too might not "have been pushed by someone who had seen it" — the good life:

> He wasn't a college graduate, but he got a taste of the better life when he was in the army after the war…he got raised up from an enlisted man to an officer…and so he saw how the other half lived.

He attributed his father's career ascension to a fluke of good luck. Mr. Broadbent pointed out that kids, through no fault of their own, are often put into a disadvantaged position unless concerted efforts are made to "level the playing field." He shared that, as a math teacher, he constantly talks to students about college and immediate careers that require mathematical expertise so that they can begin to think about their life opportunities beyond high school.

While Mr. Broadbent's analysis of the problems facing his students is by no means radical in its assessment — more critical forms of education would call for addressing with students how social class is a structure of capitalist social relations, and thus a systemic inequity — he is nonetheless successful with his disenfranchised students because he acknowledges to some degree (even if his theory is limited to luck and a lack of exposure) that there is a problem.

Mrs. Cortland also questioned the meritocratic notion of success and achievement of the "most able," particularly as commonly subscribed to in schools. She cited an incident during which the vocal music choir she advises was almost eliminated from a competition because "they [couldn't] afford to compete." Mrs. Cortland explained that her student group, "An International Affair" (self-named because of its diverse make-up), received "superior" scores at local and county competitions. Based on their superior county scores, the group was invited to compete in a festival held in Las Vegas. She explained that in order to compete, the students were required to raise funds; she wryly noted that in a more affluent part of the district, parents had recently held a golf tournament and raised more than $30,000 for their children's

trip to Australia. She juxtaposed that reality with the fundraising obstacles faced by her working-class Riverview students:

> As we began to do the fundraising, I noticed that the kids — a month before it was time to go — knew we were nowhere near the [needed] amount of money. Then I thought, "Well, we're going! It doesn't matter; we're going because we said we were going!" But they began to come up with all these excuses, "Well, my mom doesn't really want me to go" or "I have to work"…. So I said, "No! Money is not the issue. I will find sponsors for all these kids." And so…that sunk in, that we were not going to be limited because we live in the thirteenth poorest city in the United States. And for the majority of these kids, I mean a $100 is…that's the groceries for the month for the entire family! So when I took the burden away so we could just concentrate on doing it, not only did we go, we won first place. We won the "Spirit of Las Vegas Award!"

Mrs. Cortland discussed, at great length, how "competition requires more than merit" and pointed out that "the level of excellence can only be assessed to the direct tie it has to the pocket book." However, she refused to give in to the constraints that were imposed on her students because of their racial and economic backgrounds and fought to reveal the contradictions that inform current public educational practices:

> Am I supposed to tell these kids, "You're as good as you can get but we can't test your excellence or allow you to evolve any further because we don't have the money." No, we shouldn't have to worry about that if the charge in the curriculum is to create students who meet or exceed the [standards]. Then it can't be tied to the economy, it can't be tied to the color of their skin and it can't be tied to whether or not they've had this experience before in their lives.

Similarly, Dr. Peabody questioned the merit system as she acknowledged that racism is a very real obstacle in the lives of her students of color. She reported, reminding White teachers and peers that:

> Even if you were oppressed as an Anglo, being poor or whatever…what I know is that the worst day or the worst part of all of that is never as challenging as [that encountered by] a Black person or Brown person. That whole color issue brings in a whole different thing.

She admitted that a big part of her job is continuously trying to change the racist lenses of some of her teachers. Dr. Peabody explained that there aren't too many teachers that she would consider purposely racist and she avoids using the term "racist" in the school context because "it isn't that they're deliberately that way." This isn't an attempt to act as an apologist for White people's discriminatory behavior. Rather, her comment appears to represent a more profound understanding of how racism works and thus a more strategic way to confront it. As an example, she spoke of an incident where the California Scholarship Federation Honor Society (CSF) advisor did not encourage her students to participate in a district-wide CSF schol-

arship competition because the advisor did not believe that her minority students were qualified to compete against White students from more affluent schools. Dr. Peabody recalled this incident with indignation:

> I mean every flag in my head just went off….I just went through the ceiling . . . that's a deficit model, that is — "How could these kids compete with anybody else?"

She went on to describe how she confronted the teacher and used CSF alumni college graduation information to prove to this teacher just how qualified and outstanding her minority CSF students truly were.

The educators in this sample articulated their belief that other factors, such as racism and economic restrictions, often assume greater importance than pure merit and ability in their students' lives. They relate this reality in a matter of fact tone, yet they do not fall into negative or deterministic views of their students' life chances.

"You have to love Brown [people]!" — Rejecting Deficit Views of Minority Students

A second belief shared by these educators is their rejection of deficit views of their students. As evident in the above story about Mrs. Peabody's experience with the California Scholarship Federation Honor Society (CSF) advisor, she is very aware of the deficit model that's in place in schools and she insists that all students be encouraged to be their best regardless of their background. Mrs. Peabody was disgusted with the proposition that her students, even if given a fair shake, couldn't compete against White students from more affluent communities.

Mr. Broadbent stated that there were many positive aspects of Mexican culture such as demonstrating respect for elders (a practice, in his opinion, fast becoming uncommon in mainstream American culture) that he believed the students should maintain. He discussed the importance of helping his students see themselves in a positive light and learn about mainstream culture in an effort to better themselves. While exploring the deficit-model orientation and its implications, Mr. Broadbent de-emphasized issues of culture and race, and focused on social class. He explained that the belief that one could improve one's class status is where self-esteem, confidence, and motivation would come from. He argued that this approach to helping his students wasn't so much a matter of trying to assimilate them into the White mainstream — which he recognized as having its own flaws — as much as it is about introducing them to middle-class culture. Later, he mentioned that, because of his own experience growing-up as a working-class youth, he identified and felt comfortable teaching and mentoring working-class Riverview students who he felt were not deficient, but rather economically deprived.

Mr. Tijerina similarly discussed positive aspects of many of the cultures present in the school. He emphasized the highly desirable values and ways of behaving that Mexicanos/Latinos tend to bring to school. He described these students as generally hardworking, family-oriented, and desirous to improve their lot in life as well as

their families'. He argued that they are, however, unsure as to how to go about this and are often in need of teachers' guidance. However, unlike Mr. Broadbent's sole focus on socioeconomic status, Mr. Tijerina targeted issues of ethnicity and racism when discussing deficit beliefs and obstacles facing his students. He maintained that effective teachers of Mexicano/Latino students and other minorities have to be conscious of their own racist beliefs and tendencies to view the kids as less than, and to try to make them like, White students. He explained that to be effective teachers of these students, you have to discard deficit notions and "you have to like people of color — you have to authentically like dark colors, you have to love brown!" He elaborated:

> I think we have the feeling here [at Riverview] that minorities aren't inferior. I think there's a difference between the patronizing that goes on in some schools where they really think a person is inferior to some degree, but "Hey, you can make it if you try harder." The White people here, I don't think they feel that here. I think that they feel that our kids are equal — they have the same brains as kids in [more affluent predominantly White schools such as] Playa Dorada or Buena Vista or any place else. They do have the same brains, only the background is definitively disadvantaged . . . for lots of reasons.

While Mr. Broadbent emphasized socioeconomic status and Mr. Tijerina focused on race and ethnicity in their arguments against deficit perspectives of low-SES, non-White students, and linguistic-minority students both share the common belief that the academic problems that many of these students have are not a result of their culture or language. In fact, these educators distinguished between the very real economically and socially restrictive life circumstances their students live and their students' innate potential. The two seem to believe that their students "do have the same brains" but that, through no fault of their own, they have experienced difficult life conditions which are often the direct result of living in poverty and being discriminated against. They see their students' chief problem as not having money, respect, and access. However, they do not restrict their students' academic potential because of their racial or low socioeconomic standing.

While this is extremely important, it is also key that educators look at the relationships between racism and social class stratification so that class does not obscure the harmful effects of racism and vice versa. This is particularly important for Mr. Broadbent — being White — as the lethal role that racism plays in society and in schools is so often neglected by White educators who focus more on issues of social class. It is also important for Mr. Tijerina — a Chicano — to not bypass economics in pursuit of the abuses of racism and ethnocentrism. While not conflating race and class, there is an inextricable link between these two constructs that needs to be fully explored by educators.

"They play this game, 'all these [white and middle-class] students are smart and wonderful'"— Interrogating Romanticized Views of Dominant Culture

The educators in this study refuse to blindly accept dominant White culture as superior or highly desirable to emulate. They question the superordinate and romanticized status typically conferred on "mainstream," middle-class, White culture. Mr. Tijerina explained that he actually preferred working with Mexicano/Latino students instead of the more affluent White students in other schools:

> I would not teach in [more affluent White schools such as] Playa Dorada or Buena Vista. See I like these kids and I don't think I would like being in a White school because the students are, by my standards, they're disrespectful. I think they're muy igualados. Muy igualados is a good way to describe them. ["Igualado", in Mexican colloquial language, refers to someone who is in a subordinate position but acts as if equal or better to a superior. Mr. Tijerina's example refers specifically to students who assume equal or superior status with their teachers in behaving as equals come across as improper, disrespectful, and impolite.] They are muy igualados, like you owe them and "You're here to teach me"…you know, "Teach me, we pay your salary" kind of an attitude. The kids here are just very, very respectful and they're very accepting and tolerant of each other.

He emphasized the importance of maintaining traditional Mexicano/Latino cultural values and belief systems and incorporating them into the mainstream high school culture. For example, he mentioned that Mexicano/Latino students, by custom, demonstrate their respect for teachers and peers by cordially greeting others when they encounter them in hallways and other school sites and he compared their behavior with his observations of White, middle-class students who he describes as often being rude, self-absorbed, and accustomed to ignoring people.

He also mentioned that Mexicano/Latino students (and other minority students) tend to be more accepting of diversity than White mainstream youth. He provided as proof the fact that Riverview High School houses the district Special Education program and explained that Mexicano/Latino students have positively and affectionately received their Special Education peers into the school unlike what usually occurs in other schools.

Mr. Tijerina argued that mainstream middle-class White culture (with its lack of familial loyalty and over emphasis on individualism) would benefit tremendously if aspects of Mexicano/Latino culture were incorporated into it. He shared his belief that many dimensions of middle-class White culture serve to dehumanize people and yet promote the erroneous and arrogant belief that Whites are superior. He stated that if the mainstream could adopt traditional Mexican values of respect, humility, and acceptance of difference, it might become more humane and reduce the feelings of disconnection and alienation that so many of its own members feel. Mr. Tijerina added that these humanistic values and worldviews are also present in other cultural groups at Riverview High School such as Filipinos, Pacific Islanders, and the Vietnamese.

Beliefs about the superiority of White, middle- and upper-middle-class culture were also debunked by Mrs. Cortland when she spoke of the hypocrisy, dishonesty, arrogance, and disrespectful behavior often exhibited by many of the affluent White students she had worked with in the past. She pointed out that while White students, their parents, and their teachers lie to themselves about just how superior they and their students are in comparison to poorer, non-White students, she found many of them to be seriously lacking in important human qualities such as respect and empathy for others. Mrs. Cortland shared her views regarding the "psychological game" that she observed White people play:

> They [the students and their teachers] played this "game" — "All these students are smart and wonderful." And the kids would come and go, "We'll pretend we are smart and wonderful."

She also shared first-hand experiences in teaching this type of student when she began to substitute teach at the most affluent school in the district, Buena Vista High School. Mrs. Cortland highlighted the cruel and inhuman reaction of the "Anglo kids" to the news that their teacher had taken ill and would not be returning to school:

> And I mean, the lady I took over for…I think she had a nervous breakdown. They never told me but I walked in and the first class was what they called 122 English and [they were] all…Anglo kids. [When the assistant principal left me in the classroom], they [the students] all stood on their desks and sang, "Ding-Dong the Witch is Dead" and thought it was funny.

Both Mrs. Cortland and Mr. Tijerina explicitly challenge and reject romanticized perceptions of White mainstream culture. Their attitude seems to be that they "know better" than to believe unrealistic and uncritical views of White, middle-class culture. Too often, the norm in schools and in society is to compare poor, non-White, and linguistic-minority students to that invisible yet highly romanticized White, middle-class standard. These educators are not impressed by nor buy into myths of White superiority, or, conversely, to myths about Mexicano/Latino or working class inferiority. On the contrary, they very realistically name the invisible center — middle-class, White culture — and they point out numerous undesirable aspects of it. As such they are able to help students maintain their cultures and prevent their uncritical assimilation of negative, Anglo cultural beliefs and practices.

While affirming diversity is extremely important in gaining the respect and attention of students, educators should not stop there. From a critical pedagogical perspective students should also examine their own cultural backgrounds for strengths and weaknesses so as to be able to transform any unjust beliefs and practices that lie within; e.g., sexism, homophobia, religious intolerance. However, it is important to note that when I asked Mr. Tijerina about his tendency to romanticize Mexican culture to his students, his response was that he did so purposely. He explained that, throughout their lives, Mexicano/Latino and other subordinated students are only exposed to negative and racist views of their cultures. He maintained that it would

be counterproductive to engage them in critique of their home cultures because all they ever are exposed to about their ethnic group is primarily negative. Mr. Tijerina explained that students urgently needed to learn about the positive aspects and important contributions of their cultures — cultures too often portrayed in schools and by the mass media as inferior and valueless. He admitted that his portrayals of Mexican culture, history, music, etc., might be a bit romanticized but argued that Mexicano/Latino students first need to develop a positive ethnic identity before critiquing it. Furthermore, he pointed out that trying to politicize young students could be counter-productive because they are developmentally young. Mr. Tijerina presents a provocative point of view. Nevertheless, despite the legitimacy of his claims and his expertise with this age group and population, it is, nevertheless, important to devise ways to develop students' political and ideological clarity in developmentally appropriate ways so that they too can theoretically make sense of the world around them and work to transform what they feel is unjust an unacceptable.

"These experiences have shown me that if you are a person of color, it is more difficult for you to achieve" — Witnesses of Subordination and Cultural Border Crossers

A "border crosser" refers to an individual who is able and willing to develop empathy with the cultural "Other" and to authentically view as equal the values of the "Other" while conscious of the cultural group's subordinated social status in the greater society. A border crosser is someone who will critically consider the positive cultural traits of the "Other" and, at the same time, is able to critique the discriminatory practices of his/her culture that may be involved in the creation of the cultural "Other" in the first place. In other words, a border crosser, while embracing the cultural "Other", must also divest from his/her cultural privilege that often functions as a cultural border itself (Bartolomé, 2002).

My definition of a "cultural border crosser" differs from more conventional definitions that merely focus on a person's ability to successfully interact and exist in an alternative social, economic or ethnic cultural reality without dealing with the real issues of asymmetrical power relations and subordination. Members of the dominant culture typically tend to border cross without compromising their position of cultural and social privilege. This type of border crosser can travel the world, study the "Other" in a detached and curious manner without ever recognizing that cultural groups occupy different positions of power and status and that many cultural perceptions and practices result from such power asymmetries. Often, these types of ideologically and politically "blind" border crossers assume "tourist" or "voyeur" perspectives that are very much tainted by their unconscious deficit and White supremacist ideologies (Bartolomé, 2002).

The third finding of this study reveals that the educators in this sample crossed ethnic and socioeconomic borders and came to the realization that some cultural

groups, through no fault of their own, occupy positions of low social status and are marginalized and mistreated by members of higher-status groups. This realization enabled the individuals to authentically empathize with the cultural "Other" and take some form of action to equalize asymmetrical relations of power and eradicate the stigmatized social identities imposed on subordinated students.

These educators had been, at some point in their lives, profoundly affected by experiences with subordination and injustice. They all reported personally experiencing or witnessing someone else's unfair treatment. For example, Mrs. Cortland grew up as a lower-middle-class girl in an affluent White community and, early on, learned to discern social class and status differences. Mrs. Cortland shared her experiences of marginalization and explained that more affluent peers never fully accepted her family. She described one particularly hurtful memory when her father could not afford to buy her sister the "popular" shoes (also the most expensive) worn by her cohort at school. Mrs. Cortland recalled the discomfort of belonging to a "lower" class in comparison to her more affluent White community and being viewed as less despite her superior academic performance in school. Although this anecdote might not constitute in the minds of many readers an example of serious subordination, the important point is that Mrs. Cortland learned, at an early age, to question the myths of a "level playing field" and meritocracy. Her experience taught her that her lower socioeconomic status marked her as socially less valuable than her more affluent peers despite her strong intellectual abilities and merit.

Mr. Tijerina spoke of his life experiences as a working-class Chicano who grew up in Rancho Nacional and attended Riverview High School approximately 35 years ago. As a working-class minority, he was forced to cross social and cultural borders in order to survive what was at that time a middle-class, White school culture.

He reported that during his generation's attendance at Riverview High School (from 1960-1964), Mexican Americans constituted approximately 30 percent of the student body. Despite their numbers, they generally were not visible in the mainstream high school culture. He vividly remembered the second-class citizenship to which the majority of Mexican-American students were relegated. He related the condescending attitude directed at Mexicans as well as the outright disrespectful treatment they experienced. The maximum insult was to be called a "dirty Mexican" and told to "go back to Mexico." He explained, that these derogatory comments lay just under the surface of Mexican and White interactions and were frequently utilized by White students at the slightest, real or perceived, provocation.

Mr. Tijerina explained that throughout his young life, he was always conscious of the low prestige ascribed to his working-class status and Mexican ethnicity. He attributed his resilience and resistance to the strong pride he felt in being Mexicano (a value his father instilled in him) and to his increasing conscious understanding of racism and its manifestations. His later experiences with progressive Chicano organizations in the 1970s and 1980s provided him with opportunities to formally study White supremacist ideology and the practice of colonialization.

The high school principal, Mrs. Peabody, attributed her early cultural border-crossing experiences to growing up as one of a few Whites in inner city, predominantly African American, Pittsburgh. As a working-class White girl growing up in an African-American community, she explained that she learned about the advantages of cultural pluralism early on:

> Essentially my own story is that I grew up in a Black inner-city ghetto in Pittsburgh . . . to be a White person in a black inner-city ghetto is a whole other interesting thing. . . . At the time I didn't think much about it because I was there. But it turned out later to be a real strength….I learned about different people and different cultures. I did not think it was unusual to have Black friends and eat in their house — or Jewish or Puerto Rican friends — because I did it all the time.

Although, like Mr. Tijerina, she too experienced first hand what it means to be relegated to low status, given her position as a "minority" White person in her African-American community, she recognized the life-long privilege and preferential treatment she received by virtue of being White. She told of her exposure to racism and discrimination as chiefly a result of her close work with people of color.

She also shared her belief in allowing people of color to "use" her position as a White person (perceived by other Whites as a more legitimate spokesperson) to carry their messages (e.g., support for bilingual education, allowing students to demonstrate against an anti-immigrant proposition). Dr. Peabody shared her conscious decision to utilize her privileged position as a White woman to become a change-agent in school settings.

> In my career when I started in Riverview School District, they [the Mexicanos/Latinos] used me. I allowed myself to be used. So they used to me to be the carrier at of their messages . . . I have a lot of credibility [as perceived by others because of her whiteness] and because I am a very strong personality, I [cannot] be swayed off course.

Dr. Peabody explained that her own working-class background helped her understand Riverview High School and the surrounding community. Her identification and feelings of solidarity with working-class Mexican culture were also evident in her relationship with a parent she met during her first principalship in the district. She explained that the parent became a real advocate for her and that she came to realize, "Oh my God, she's more like my grandmother than most White [middle-class] women!" Dr. Peabody's feelings of solidarity with working-class, non-White, and linguistic minorities have led her to assume the role of advocate and cultural broker for her students, parents, and communities.

The cultural border-crossing experiences of the educators in this study were substantively different from typical "tourist" or "voyeur" White border-crossing experiences. Personally experiencing or witnessing someone else's subordination left a permanent impression on these educators. They learned early on that some folks are seen and treated as low status simply because of their race, ethnicity, and

class. Given their "baptism of fire" during their border-crossing experiences, these educators learned to more clearly discern and understand unequal power relations among cultural groups and consequently they worked toward reducing and preventing their reproduction at Riverview High School.

Although the scope of this study did not allow for student interviews, it is important to note that any continuation of this important effort to reduce and prevent the reproduction of unequal power relations and abusive practices in schools should include generating dialogue with students in the classrooms (and with members of the community) about oppressive practices by allowing them to share their own feelings and experiences if they so choose. When teachers assume the role of cultural broker for their students, it is the first step in being able and willing to create this critical dialogical space.

"You're here to encourage them . . . to help them go to college, to help them do all those good things — that's what you're here for" — Educators as Dedicated Cultural Brokers

All of the educators in this study mentioned the need to mentor and "show students the way" to a better life as part of their professional responsibility as teachers and administrators. Given their clarity in understanding the hierarchy of social status generated within the asymmetry of power and economic relations, they shared their commitment to helping their low-SES, non-White, and linguistic-minority students, typically depicted as low status and deficient by the greater society, to better understand school culture in order to succeed socially and academically therein. Though they did not employ the term "cultural broker," they all spoke about their role in helping students more effectively navigate school and mainstream culture.

Mr. Broadbent seemed particularly preoccupied with the students' inability to see beyond their experiences in Riverview High School and the Rancho Nacional community. He spoke often of the need to get the students to see "how the other half lives" so as to motivate them to do well in school. One of his greatest frustrations was his perceived inability to help the students see their high school experience as a stepping-stone toward college or a good-paying job. One of the strategies he employed for helping students both see the bigger picture and assume control over their learning process has been to teach them the "rules of the game" in very explicit ways. For example, when teaching math and computer technology courses, he often explicitly links the skills and knowledge bases taught with immediate job opportunities in an effort to help students demystify "high tech" jobs, see the immediate relevance of the classes, and view these employment opportunities as possible for them.

While it is important to recognize that students should be encouraged to reach higher in their aspirations, the idea that not being able to 'see' a better life is in large part what keeps subordinated students down can easily be misinterpreted. If

it's just a matter of seeing the virtues of a middle-class reality — with the help of a teacher — that leads to success, this puts the onus on students subsequent to their exposure to knowledge, career opportunities, and a taste of "how the other half lives", and again disregards the systemic and ideological obstacles that get in their way. In other words, simply seeing the good life does not ensure getting access to it regardless of how hard one tries. It is important that educators heed Mr. Broadbent's call to raise as much awareness and confidence in students as possible in order to increase their chances of success. However, critical pedagogues also encourage keeping an eye on and working to eradicate the deeper ideological and material barriers that subordinated students face.

Mr. Broadbent repeatedly spoke of the importance of being open and honest with students and not withholding vital information from them. Again, because his particular subject matter — math and computer technology — can easily be misrepresented as being too abstract and difficult, he reported making a conscious effort to teach the courses in accessible and student-friendly ways. He explained that the Navy is a good example of an institution where power is maintained by a select few precisely by withholding information from the majority. As part of his strategy for establishing honest, caring, and trusting relations with students, he highlighted his ability to communicate with his students.

> I think for the most part, I've been able to talk to the kids. I don't talk down [to them] and unlike in the Navy where people are trying to hide something from you just so that they can have power, I tell the kids straight out what I think [and expect in class] and I don't hide anything from them.

Mr. Broadbent explained that his job consists not only in imparting strong mathematics knowledge for immediate and later use, but also in mentoring kids around life in general. He likened his role as teacher to his own father's role as parent, "I'm like a stepfather for many of my kids, especially the boys who don't have a dad at home." He shared that in this parent-mentor role he exhibits authentic concern and caring for students. However, he added that simply caring for students is not enough and that teachers need to "back-up" their caring with real action in the form of solid content instruction and honest teacher-student communication.

Mr. Tijerina similarly emphasized the importance of teachers assuming a mentoring role vis-à-vis their students. He shared his opinion that, the majority of Riverview High School students are "good kids" who because of their unfamiliarity with school culture require teacher guidance in figuring out the "rules of the game" in school and in the outside world. He mentioned that students not only receive help from teachers but also from top quality counselors at Riverview High who provide assistance and counseling in three languages: English, Spanish, and Tagalog. He pointed out that the counselors do an outstanding job getting students into college precisely because they demystify the concept of "college." For example, the counselors take students and parents on college visits and invite former River-

view graduates to share their college experiences. In addition, the counselors assist students in filling out applications, writing statements of purpose, and practicing interview strategies for getting accepted into the college of their choice.

Mr. Tijerina also shared his techniques for helping students understand school culture. He explained that he explicitly discusses his class rules and even role-plays with students in order for them to clearly understand academic and behavioral expectations. He is particularly explicit when it comes to grading:

> I tell them, "You can see your grades whenever you want" — we have folders on all the students' work. I say, "Hey, you can see them whenever you want, you know, here's your total. I grade you on the curve or on a class scale, or on a standard scale, whichever is best for you" I treat them like adults. "I'm not trying to cheat you. I'm not trying to trick you."

Mr. Tijerina is adamant in his belief that as teachers of young people, particularly youth who don't understand the school culture clearly, it is important that teachers be open, sincere, honest, as well as encouraging. He added:

> [As a teacher], you're not here to put down students or to give them "F's". You're not here to confuse them. You're not here to threaten them. You're not here to be dishonest with them. You're here to encourage them, to make them feel good, to help them, to help them go to college, to help them do all those good things — that's what you're here for.

The educators in this study articulated the importance of explicitly assisting their students in better understanding both school and mainstream culture. In school, they reported that they consciously work to assist students in effectively dealing with both the explicit and hidden aspects of the school curriculum. These teachers mentioned the importance of demystifying grading and evaluation procedures and the college application process as strategies for helping their students become confident, empowered learners. They reported striving to provide their students with practices and knowledge bases that are typically unavailable to working-class youth — the very cultural capital that many middle-class and more privileged parents regularly provide their own children in order to insure their competitive advantage (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, Vásquez & Mehan, 2000).

One way to expand the important work that these educators have been doing is to move beyond simply helping students to better understand and navigate school and mainstream culture, by engaging them in strategies to theorize for themselves and actively work to democratize and transform such cultural practices. One gets the impression in Riverside that the goal, as well-intentioned as it may be, is to protect students, guide them, help them develop greater ethnic pride, and get them into college. Education is believed to be the great equalizer and thus the key for subordinated students to enter into a better life. Many of the teachers proudly listed off names of students who have returned to the community after completing college and have assumed positions of leadership, but they did not address strategies for

encouraging such student behavior. Furthermore, although the teachers hinted of the importance of preparing their students for future advocacy and leadership roles, there was no mention of explicit efforts to encourage students to develop counter-hegemonic beliefs and practices. Rather than embracing a pedagogy of temporary "comfort zone," critical educators need to generate an explicit and developmentally appropriate pedagogy of getting in with the intent of, once you're in, transforming the very abusive dominant ideological forces that created and maintain society's margins in the first place. While learning and appropriating from the successes of these four remarkable people in this study is important, any critical democratic pedagogy should include a transformative politic that works to combat the very social order that gives rise to impoverished and disenfranchised communities.

Implications for Teacher Education

It is evident that the four educators in this study understand that teaching is not an apolitical undertaking. They questioned, albeit to various degrees, the dominant culture's explanations of the existing social order. They also report rejecting deficit ideologies and respecting and valuing non-White, linguistic-minority, and working class cultures. In addition, the educators resist romanticizing White, middle-class mainstream culture and reject total assimilation as a goal for their students. Furthermore, because they also perceive that their students are not operating on a level playing field, these educators highlight their willingness to assume roles as advocates and cultural brokers for them. These findings suggest the power that teachers and other educators, as change-agents, possess and can potentially wield in their work for creating more just and democratic schools. And, as these educators have achieved great successes with their students, I believe that there are lessons to be learned here, regardless of the questions that I have raised.

In the following section, I would like to conclude by discussing possible implications of my findings for teacher preparation. My comments focus specifically on transforming teacher education coursework and practicum experiences by infusing key critical pedagogical practices. As Pepi Leistyna and Arlie Woodrum (1996) correctly explain, "Critical pedagogy is primarily concerned with the kinds of educational theories and practices that encourage both students and teachers to develop an understanding of the interconnecting relationship among ideology, power, and culture" (p. 3). In order for teachers to better understand this three-way relation, two important critical pedagogical principles need to inform the curriculum: a critical understanding of dominant ideologies, and exposure to and development of effective counter-hegemonic discourses to resist and transform such oppressive practices (Darder, Torres & Baltodano, 2002).

Explicit Study of Ideology

The aforementioned research reveals that the exemplary educators in Riverside

questioned three common dominant ideologies about the existing social order: the myth of meritocracy, deficit views of minority students, and the superiority of White mainstream culture. An important implication of this pattern of political clarity, given the success of these educators, is the need to incorporate into teacher education programs learning experiences that will formally and explicitly examine ideology. In this way educators can see what's currently in place in a society, where one actually stands and why, and what can be done to contest existing social injustices that are part and parcel of mainstream sociocultural practices. Darder et al. (2002) point out that the study of ideology

> serves as a starting point for asking questions that will help teachers to evaluate critically their practice and to better recognize how the culture of the dominant class becomes embedded in the hidden curriculum — curriculum that is informed by ideological views that silence students and structurally reproduce the dominant cultural assumptions and practices that thwart democratic education. (p. 13)

This could include exposing students to (and encouraging them to provide insight given their own experiences) alternative explanations for the academic underachievement of minorities, to the myth of meritocracy and how such a theory works to explain and justify the existing social (dis)order, and to how assimilationist models reinforce antagonistic social relations and fundamentally undemocratic practices. What I am suggesting is that the teacher education curriculum (coursework and practicum experiences) be deliberately designed and carried out to expose prospective teachers to a variety of ideological postures so that they can begin to perceive their own ideologies in relation to others' and critically examine the damaging biases they may personally hold, and the inequalities and injustices present in schools and in the society as a whole.

The end result, hopefully, will be the preparation of teachers, like the educators in the sample, who are not afraid to assume counter-hegemonic positions in an effort to better understand and change current inequalities in schools. However, the means for bringing about such teacher political and ideological clarity can, and should, vary from program to program as context-specific adaptation in crucial. In other words, even though it is important to provide pre-service teachers with critical pedagogical strategies, particular instructional programs and specific teaching methods, it is erroneous to assume that blind replication of these programs and methods will, in and of themselves, guarantee successful student learning.

Additionally, the border-crossing experiences of the target teachers, during which they personally experienced or witnessed someone else's subordination, need to be replicated or simulated in coursework and practicum experiences. These curricular experiences should be organized in ways that increase the likelihood that prospective teachers learn about the realities of subordination and marginalization (similar to what the educators learned via their own cultural border-crossing experiences). I am in no way suggesting that teacher educators brainwash their

students to think in an ideologically uniform way. Nor am I suggesting that it is necessary to mistreat prospective teachers so they can, as the target teachers in the study have done, experience subordination first-hand in order for them to grasp the concept of asymmetrical power relations. The idea is simply to open up students to a wide range of experiences so that they can expand, hold up to a critical light, and adjust their own ideological lens in ways that make the classroom more inclusive, exploratory, and transformative.

Educating teachers to understand the importance of their role as defenders and cultural advocates for their students also needs to be addressed and encouraged in coursework and practicum experiences. As stated earlier, cultural brokers can create the necessary self-empowering conditions within which students play an active role in their own learning — in which they have a voice in the overall institutional process.

There are teacher preparation programs around the country that provide learning experiences with the potential to help prospective teachers increase their cultural awareness. For example, many teacher education programs require that students learn a second language so that they can better communicate with linguistic-minority students. A few innovative programs actually go as far as presenting their students with opportunities to study abroad in order to develop multilingual and multicultural competencies as well as cross-cultural sensitivities. However, most teacher preparation programs do not offer courses and practicum experiences that will enable students to identify and understand the role of ideology (hegemonic and counter-hegemonic) in teaching. There are programs that require prospective teachers to visit, observe, and student-teach in low-income and culturally diverse schools in order to learn about "cultural differences," but even these programs are rarely deliberately designed to ensure that prospective teachers study what structurally produces such oppressed communities, and engage in generating alternative ideological positions regarding the low social status and academic achievement of subordinated populations.

Despite good intentions on the part of many teacher educators and the tremendous potential of many of their learning activities to increase political and ideological clarity, prospective teachers are generally left to their own devices when making sense of cross-cultural and cross-socioeconomic class experiences. Often, the unanticipated end result of many of these learning experiences is that the majority of students emerge evermore bound to their unquestioned ethnocentric ideologies precisely because they go into these learning situations without explicitly identifying and questioning the ideological lenses that filter their perceptions. For example, I have had student-teachers that completed part of their student teaching in Mexico. While there, they witness poverty and mistreatment of indigenous people and of the poor; a common reaction has been to denounce those practices in Mexico and to rejoice upon returning to the U.S. "where these things don't happen." A well-conceptualized teacher education program would foresee and plan for

this type of student reaction. At the very minimum, debriefing sessions designed to deal with dominant ideologies and resulting social hierarchies in Mexico and in the U.S. would serve to increase students' understanding of oppression. This would also require an in-depth analysis of the devastating effects that international trade 'agreements' like NAFTA have on the people, economics, and politics of both nations. Unfortunately, educators are rarely encouraged to explore how nations, like the U.S. and Mexico, via a long history of foreign and economic policies, are intertwined socially, politically, and culturally.

Assuming a Counter-Hegemonic Stance: Subverting the System for the Good of the Students

Interestingly enough, during cross-cultural learning experiences, I have witnessed a small minority of participating students, on their own, identify abusive asymmetrical power relations at work and consequently assume the role of student defender. For example, I have had prospective teachers describe to me how learning a second language placed them in a position of vulnerability that allowed them to see the world from the eyes of a second language learner. They experienced the fragility one feels when attempting to acquire a new language and understand, first hand, the difficulty in learning a second language. Similarly, after working in low-income schools in this country and abroad, many students have approached me irate and indignant about the life and school conditions of low-SES, non-White students. For many of these students, their anger and indignation serve as a catalyst that propels them to question what they previously considered to be a fair social order and to take some type of action to "subvert the system" and do right by their students.

The concept of "subverting the system" brings to mind a young woman I worked with years ago in a public university teacher education program. Similar to a great number of students in teacher education programs, this young woman came into the program with unexamined beliefs about the social order and status quo. She came into the program, though largely unaware of it, with an uncritical acceptance of the social order as just and fair. Given her unexamined ideological orientation and rather sheltered life experiences, she demonstrated little comprehension of the very real inequities confronting subordinated students in schools and the larger society.

I distinctly remember her initial discomfort with Paulo Freire's (and other critical pedagogues') writings and, in particular, her rejection of the notion that teachers of subordinated students often have to work in ways that teach against the grain in order to do right by the children. The young woman voiced her disbelief and discomfort with this critical notion and argued that it was not necessary for teachers to resort to subversive behavior since the key function of schools is precisely to help students. The student recalled her own experience as a middle-class, White, public school student and maintained that school systems were fair places and that students who failed to succeed did not take full advantage of the opportunities afforded them.

However, later in the semester — while completing her student-teaching experience in a predominantly African-American and Mexicano/Latino urban elementary school — she came into class and shared that she had engaged in her first act of conscious resistance against school rules; rules which she felt worked to hurt and further subordinate her students.

She explained that the urban elementary school in which she student-taught had very few green areas. The young woman voiced her opinion that she found the lack of grassy areas and vegetation to be especially unacceptable given that the school was supposed to service young children. The student-teacher then went on to describe one area of the school that had a small tree and small plot of grass that was off limits to students. On a particularly warm day, she decided she wanted to read a story to her students under the shade of that small tree. Although she was well aware that students were not allowed in this area, she consciously broke the rule in order to, as she explained, provide her students with an optimal storybook reading experience. She angrily pointed out that White students in middle-class and suburban schools take for granted learning opportunities such as sitting on the grass and having a story read to them, while her children (poor Mexicanos/Latinos and African Americans) were prohibited from sitting on the only patch of green grass available at the school.

Although this particular student's act of subversion was not particularly radical or extreme, my point is that it is precisely this outrage and sense of student advocacy — reflective of increased political and ideological clarity — that I believe that all teachers, but in particular, teachers of subordinated students, must possess in order to do right by the young people that they serve. Such prospective teachers, like the experienced educators described in this article, have in part surmised that their previously held ideological explanations for the existing social order (e.g., that the social order is fair and based on ability and merit, that if people work hard enough they can overcome oppression, etc.) were not adequate for explaining the grave inequities, injustice, and subordination they witnessed. Unfortunately, in my experience as a teacher educator, the majority of prospective teachers are not quite so perceptive or flexible in their thinking to consider alternative ideological explanations without assistance from teacher education personnel.

Concluding Thoughts

Prospective teachers, all educators for that matter, need to begin to develop the political and ideological clarity that will guide them in denouncing discriminatory school and social conditions and practices. This clarity is crucial if teachers truly wish to better instruct, protect, and advocate for their students. It is also indispensable if educators endeavor to nurture youth into being critical thinkers capable of acting upon the world. According to Freire (1998a, 1998b), beyond technical skills, teachers should also be equipped with a full understanding of what it means to have

courage — to denounce the present inequities that directly harm certain populations of students — and effectively create psychologically healthy, culturally responsive, humanizing, and self-empowering educational contexts. Critical pedagogy challenges us to see through the dense fog of ideology and to become courageous in our commitment to defend subordinated student populations — even when it is easier not to take a stand — and equip them with critical transformative tools. Freire (1997) states:

> What keeps a person, a teacher able as a liberatory educator is the political clarity to understand the ideological manipulations that discomfirm human beings as such, the political clarity that would tell us that it is ethically wrong to allow human beings to be dehumanized. . . . One has to believe that if men and women created the ugly world that we are denouncing, then men and women can create a world that is less discriminating and more humane. . . . (p. 315)

In the spirit of the realistic yet hopeful educators in this study, critical pedagogy reminds us of the importance of clearly identifying obstacles in order to work collaboratively with students and communities to come up with equally clear and realistic strategies for overcoming them.

Note

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