Resistance and Renegotiation

Preservice Teacher Interactions with and Reactions to Multicultural Education Course Content

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New awareness of the power of point of view provided students a basis for much reflection about their values and beliefs; however, many became angry and resistant when they found their attitudes about the reality they wanted to believe in were in conflict with the reality they experienced while 'wearing the shoes' of another person. (Ahlquist, 1991, p. 163)

Although many programs ascribe to promoting and celebrating diversity, traditional teacher preparation rarely centralizes multicultural education courses. Instead, these courses are often "added on" to or disconnected from the rest of the program (Dilworth, 1992; Vavrus, 2002). Multicultural education courses and other courses that address diversity often ask the preservice teachers enrolled to reflect critically on their own identities through the lenses of power and privilege.

Given the peripheral positioning of courses of this nature in their preparation, one could expect preservice teachers to be unfamiliar and uncomfortable with this process, resulting in cognitive dissonance as well as a certain level of resistance. Many aspiring teachers, and people in general, aspire to be "colorblind" (Irvine, 2003; Milner, 2006; Sleeter, 2001). This ideology assumes that color, race, and ethnicity should not be considered in explanations of how people are treated (Gillespie, Asbaugh, & DeFiore, 2002), and therefore relieves teachers of the responsibility of explicitly addressing race and ethnicity in their classrooms.

The majority of preservice and inservice teachers are White, European American, middle-class, monolingual women (Gay & Howard, 2000) living in a society in which whiteness is positioned as the norm (Weiler, 1988). Consequently, many

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have not previously considered themselves to be raced, classed, or even cultural beings (Assaf & Dooley, 2006; Clark, 1999; Galman, 2006; Ryan, 2006). This keeps most preservice teachers far from relating concepts of race, class, and culture to the realm of teaching and learning in a meaningful way.

One goal of multicultural education courses is to provide a forum to discuss the experiences of those belonging to nondominant groups based on race, ethnicity, language, class, gender, physical ability, religion, and sexual orientation, among others (Nieto & Bode, 2008). As Roberta Ahlquist (1991) describes in the quote above, these experiences do not constitute the realities of most preservice teachers sitting in multicultural education classrooms. An overwhelming majority of White preservice teachers are unfamiliar with these realities, particularly those of people of color (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Few preservice teachers have deeply considered the possibility that another individual's world view could be so profoundly different from their own, particularly within the shared spaces of schools. Schools are fair and democratic in the minds of many White preservice teachers, who often categorize their own public schooling experiences as largely positive, or at least benign (Michie, 2007; Ryan, 2006).

Multicultural education courses typically propose alternate visions exploring how schools, for many, do not live up to the democratic ideals they claim, but instead serve as vehicles to perpetuate inequality. Instructors of multicultural education courses are faced with the double-edged challenge of encouraging White preservice teachers to not only consider this new and disheartening view, but to realize that it is likely the view held by many of their students. In other words, White students are asked to identify themselves as cultural beings, as well as to affirm the sociocultural

and sociopolitical realities of others. The importance of tackling this affirmation is magnified when juxtaposed with current demographics. Over one-third of students in American public schools are students of color, a number that is rapidly increasing while the teaching force remains overwhelmingly White (Nieto & Bode, 2008; Sleeter 2001).

As potentially the only meeting grounds within most teacher education programs for these conflicting realities and visions of schools prior to preservice teachers' entrance into the field, investigation of the multicultural teacher education classroom and its dynamics is imperative. This article critically examines the interactions between members of a college classroom community, consisting of 26 predominantly White female students and their instructor, a man of color, in a graduate multicultural education course. Data collection and analysis were guided by the following research question: How do White preservice teachers' interact with and react to the content of a multicultural education course, particularly in regards to issues of race?

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

I approach this work from a sociocultural perspective, which views knowledge and identities as constantly in a process of negotiation and renegotiation through discourse (Gee, 1999) and narrative (Wortham, 2001). These negotiations take place in both smaller microcultures (Ryan, 2006) and discourse communities (Gee, 1999) and within a larger sociopolitical context (Nieto & Bode, 2008). This is a particularly appropriate lens given that multicultural education classrooms, although not all the same, often serve as sites where multiple discourses are presented.

Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode (2008) consider this exposure to multiple voices

to be essential for preservice teachers to develop identities as multicultural people and, in turn, identities as multicultural educators. Preservice teachers are challenged to integrate these new perspectives with their existing worldviews, a reorientation process that can be both "exhausting and difficult" (Nieto & Bode, 2008, p. 425).

Lori Assaf and Caitlin Dooley (2006) describe this process in the Bakhtinian tradition of "ideological becoming," in which individuals' internally persuasive discourses interact with authoritative discourses. "As a person interacts within society, authoritative discourses can actually bleed into and become internally persuasive discourses. Theoretically, the two discourses are always in back-and-forth movement as an individual's ideologies are shaped" (p. 43).

This research operates under the belief that preservice teachers and all individuals construct and negotiate multiple identities in their movement between different communities and contexts (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Therefore the multicultural identity development of preservice teachers is not viewed as following a linear and monodirectional path.

Participants and Setting

The invitation to participate was extended to and accepted by all members of a graduate level multicultural education course at a large public university in the Northeastern U.S. Using conventions of ethnographic research, I immersed myself into this classroom community of preservice teachers and their instructor throughout a 15-week multicultural education course. The course is offered as one option to fulfill a three credit diversity requirement for the teacher preparation program. Other options include courses in bilingual education and biliteracy, teaching English language learners, and international education. The aforementioned preservice teachers were in their final semester of the program during the time of this study, and anticipated joining the teaching force in the following academic year.

The class met once a week, after most students' internship fieldwork in schools. Twenty-four of the 26 students were female, 23 White, and one Latina. Of the two male students, one was White and the other an international student from Latin America. The ages of the students ranged between early to mid-twenties. Most students were "traditional" teacher

education candidates and had little if any work experience.

The course, entitled Multicultural Education, was designed to explore the ways in which educational opportunities are impacted by sociocultural and sociopolitical factors including, but not limited to, racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia. To accomplish this, the instructor constructed activities challenging prospective teachers to consider their own multiple identities, the lived realities of others, and the role of education as a system of social reproduction. The instructor presented an overview of multicultural issues by organizing each week's discussion around the school and life experiences of a traditionally underrepresented group.

The instructor for the course was a Latino man, well-versed in the field of multicultural education. He began teaching the course examined for this study with seven years of prior experience in teaching multicultural education courses, as well as a doctoral degree in Language, Literacy and Culture and several published research articles concerning culturally relevant pedagogy. The instructor designed the course to encourage discussion and dialogue, both peer-to-peer and student-to-instructor. This was implemented through initial discussions to begin each class meeting, as well as several group activities assigned during the class period.

Procedures

I attended all class meetings, observed interactions, and recorded my observations through ethnographic field notes. It is typical for doctoral students to take courses with teacher education students. Therefore, to my knowledge, my presence was not a distraction. Although not a formal member of the teacher education cohort in question, I share the same White, European American, female, monolingual identity as the majority of my participants.

As a product of the same cultural forces and influences, I realize that this factors into my researcher subjectivity, in both data collection and analysis. My lens for observation was influenced by my own role as a doctoral student, as a supervisor of student teachers, as a former elementary school teacher, and also as a graduate of the teacher preparation program in which the course is embedded.

While this emic perspective may present certain challenges, it also allows for a more accurate, complete analysis. As a participant observer, I had complete access to

course content, conversations in class, and online forum posts. These biweekly posts were completed by students in response to designated prompts provided by either the instructor or their peers, and relating to topics discussed in class or the assigned readings.

To gain more insight, I offered all students the opportunity to be interviewed about their experiences in the course upon its completion. Interviews were arranged and conducted with a small subset of the class. The interview questions were open-ended and designed to promote conversation around student perceptions of the course, both initial and final.

All data sources, including transcriptions of the interviews, were analyzed using inductive coding methods and analytical memos (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I shared data and my analyses with the instructor and class members for member checking purposes and considerations of validity.

This work does not proclaim to be generalizable to all populations of prospective teachers, but rather seeks to contribute to the existing body of literature on multicultural teacher development. This aligns with the hope that improved teacher education will lead to an improvement in the quality of K-12 education, particularly for traditionally underrepresented students.

Preservice Teacher Resistance to Multicultural Education

Student resistance has been widely researched within the context of K-12 public schools, particularly in reference to culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students resisting dominant school culture centered on White, middle class, monolingual norms (Finn, 1999; Ogbu, 1992). Daniel Solórzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal (2001) contend that the majority of this work focuses on working-class males and forms of resistance that are characterized as self-defeating for these students. They have extended the work to illuminate positive forms of resistance exhibited by traditionally oppressed students, in particular a form of resistance that is characterized by a social justice agenda and a desire to change their subordinated status. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) refer to this phenomenon as transformative resistance, which differs from the resistance reported by most researchers.

Building on existing studies such as these, my research concerns student re-

sistance with new actors in a new context. These actors are not working-class male students of color in K-12 schools, but White middle to upper-class female students in a program of higher education. In the context of this study, students are not resisting in an attempt to improve unfair or inequitable school policies and conditions that they have been forced to endure, but instead are resisting the notion that these inequities can and do exist.

In addition, unlike K-12 students described in many resistance studies, these students are able to simultaneously resist and experience school success in ways that it is traditionally conceptualized, for example producing quality work and earning high grades. In instances when this is not the case, students often do not question their power or right to challenge instructors or policies, and in some extreme cases will even go to the lengths of involving external parties or representation.

For these reasons, this brand of resistance does not qualify as transformative resistance, or self-defeating resistance. However, the two contexts, K-12 schools and the higher education classroom, may be more similar than they seem in this particular case. Potential cultural conflict as described by Lisa Delpit (1995) may still be at play, particularly in a context involving predominantly White students with a professor of color. Although this aspect of the classroom community was not the focus of this study, it is important to acknowledge this contextual factor as a possible root of resistance. In essence, the dynamic resembles typical student resistance seen in K-12 settings, but with a reverse in power relations.

Herbert Kohl (1994) defines student resistance as seen in K-12 schools as the act of "not-learning," which he warns should not be mistaken for failure or inability to learn. The act of not-learning is not a decision of convenience, rather "it involves effort, and often rejection of even the most compassionate and well-designed teaching, occurring most often in the face of challenges to one's personal and family loyalties, integrity, and identity" (Kohl, 1994, p. 4).

Core content of contemporary multicultural education, namely the examination of institutionalized systems of racism and privilege, present these same challenges to White preservice teachers. For example, when students are challenged to de-center Whiteness and view the world from an alternative standpoint, responses are often highly charged (Clark & O'Donnell, 1999).

These students are accustomed to seeing the world from an individual viewpoint, without acknowledgement of institutional influences. Embedded within this individualistic view is often a staunch belief in meritocracy, making examples of unearned privilege even harder to swallow.

Furthermore, racism is conceptualized at the level of the individual. Preservice teacher visions of themselves as nonracist are directly challenged. Students are then confronted with the decision to resist these revelations or renegotiate their reality to include them. The majority of preservice teachers hold tightly to their world views in an attempt to preserve their identities as nonprejudiced, hard workers who have earned their status and benefits. Unlike Kohl's definition of not-learning, this resistance is clearly a decision of convenience.

Current literature demonstrates that most multicultural education courses move beyond modeling the infusion of multicultural texts and resources into a standard curriculum, or the additive approach to multiculturalism as described by James Banks (1995). Instead, when well-executed, these courses engage preservice teachers in a process of raising their awareness of power dynamics and inequities in our educational system and broader society (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005; Sleeter, 2001; Ukpokodu, 2003).

Many White preservice teachers are receptive to this process when highlighting curricula, texts, and media images, but are considerably less so when asked to move the microscope onto themselves and their own assumptions, opinions, and attitudes regarding race, class, and ethnicity and their connections to education. This self-examination was a cornerstone of this particular multicultural education course, and many argue it is the most important component of multicultural teacher development (Brown, 2004; Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005; Clark & O'Donnell, 1999).

Students are asked to become introspective about their own status, and how that positions them in the power dynamics of schools and society. An inevitable result of this intense process is the realization of the unearned power and privilege of Whites at the expense of subordinated groups. Moreover, an added layer of complexity appears when White students are engaged in addressing concepts such as privilege, oppression, and institutional racism with a professor of color, as is the case in this study.

Students may question the magnitude or even the existence of societal oppres-

sion and injustice when the message is delivered by someone who has "made it" (Ladson-Billings, 1996). One manifestation of this resistance may be reflected in instructor evaluations. Several studies have determined that professors of color often receive lower scores than their White counterparts (Williams, 2007).

Findings

The notion of resistance was a prominent theme throughout the data sources. In what follows I describe the various ways in which preservice teachers enacted resistant stances. First, I describe how preservice teachers performed resistance through acts of silence. Then, I explore the ways in which preservice teachers vocally resisted the content and requirements of the multicultural education course. Next, I discuss preservice teacher resistance to buying into or accepting roles as vehicles for educational change.

In addition to examining resistance, I explore significant moments in which students engaged in the complex process of ideological renegotiation. Finally, I discuss the implications for the preparation of teachers to work with students of diverse backgrounds.

Resistance as Silence

> This refusal to talk is often the only way a child has to fight against the authority and power of adults. But this critical examination of classroom silence by those for whom school is a successful, if not gratifying, experience is new terrain. (Ladson-Billings, 1996, p. 82)

Contrary to existing literature describing the silencing effect of predominantly White teacher education programs on preservice teachers of color (Delpit, 1995; Sleeter, 2001), or examinations of self-defeating resistance of K-12 students of color (Kohl, 1994; Ogbu, 1992), this work explores the seemingly deliberate silences of preservice teachers in the majority. As the course progressed over the semester, it became clear that members of the class relied on a small group of students to engage in discussion with the instructor.

The majority of students provided occasional responses to the content and another small group of students did not participate in any class discussions. This occurred in spite of the classroom climate created by the instructor, which was conducive to and encouraged self-reflective discussion. The climate resembled previous multicultural education and critical

pedagogy courses I had taken in which a safe space was established for students to take risks and initiate dialogue to promote growth.

In addition, the instructor made explicit connections between self-reflective discussion and engaging in the process of multicultural development needed to be successful educators of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Furthermore, both the syllabus and the instructor addressed the role of participation in grading from the onset of the course. When reminded of this component in the last two weeks of the semester, some members of this group opted to chime in on the class discussion, but others stayed silent. This was a surprising finding due to heightened grade-consciousness typical of many preservice teachers (Ahlquist, 1991; Ukpokodu, 2003).

Discussions occurred in both whole group and small group formats. Small groups were often used as a strategy to elicit conversation for students less likely to share their thoughts in the larger forum. I noted that even in the less-intimidating setting of a group of four, several of these silent teachers still chose not to participate.

One of the interviewees, a vocal member of the classroom community, noted that her expectations of the class discussions, which had been influenced by peers who had taken the class the previous semester, were not met.

> Um, I guess I kind of expected it to be more of a discussion than it ended up... I was kind of disappointed a little bit in that. Not in the class, but the people I guess. It was always the same people talking and the same points of view, which is OK, but I don't know if that just became a habit, you know it was just routine. And other people were just like, oh you know, we'll just sit back. Because I haven't said anything and it's already half way through the semester and I can't say anything now.

Students were often silent or reluctant to answer questions about historical facts or statistics regarding students or people of color. This student attributed lack of response to the lack of diversity in the class, inferring that she and her White peers did not possess the cultural knowledge to make significant contributions to particular discussions. Although this may be the case, it is important to consider the possibility that these silences were attempts to steer discussion away from the topic of race. To conclude that all silences were due to lack of knowledge could falsely dismiss the possibility that these silences were

intentional acts of resistance or defiance (Ladson-Billings, 1996).

One pattern that emerged was the tendency to shift conversations of race to matters of class or economic differences. The "class, not race" response was offered in response to several examples, including a film depicting two schools in the same district with clearly unbalanced resources. Many were unwilling to identify or examine the intersectionalities between class and race until prompted by the instructor, and still showed resistance to the idea that the two were closely related. Preservice teachers also utilized this argument when discussing their own professional development districts.

In describing an affluent district in which several preservice teachers are placed for fieldwork assignments, one student claimed, "But Greenbury [pseudonym] has more resources; it's not because of race." Geneva Gay and Kipchoge Kirkland (2003) reported similar comments from preservice teachers, such as "it's more about economic status than race because there are more differences within than among groups" (p. 183). This shift in analysis is another form of subtle silence, in which students are speaking and participating, but intentionally maneuvering the dialogue to alternate issues, and in turn silencing potential discussions on race.

Resisting Racism

Resistance also took the form of verbal debate. Several of the vocal students in the class challenged the instructor in discussions of race and racism. Before detailing how this resistance was expressed, it is important to share how these terms are commonly defined by the field of multicultural education, and as a result, how they were represented by the instructor. In keeping with the pluralistic perspective of multicultural education, the instructor made it clear that students were not being asked to agree with the definitions, nor were they absolute, and invited dialogue about them.

However, for the purposes of discussion, they would adopt definitions of terms like racism that were consistent with those in assigned texts and the larger fields of multicultural education and social justice education. As a result, race was presented as a social construction, and racism was explained as the combination of prejudice and institutional power (Jackson, 1976; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Tatum, 1997). Students were invited by the instructor

to make their own meanings from these definitions.

The majority of the students in the course acknowledged the existence of prejudice and discrimination, but they were less willing, if not unwilling, to accept the relationship between racism and institutional power. Given that Whites are a dominant group with institutional power, the logical progression of thought led them to the conclusion that prejudiced or discriminatory acts committed by Whites fell under the definition of racism, while those committed by people of color did not.

Resistance to this conclusion manifested in a variety of ways, but was particularly salient during the discussion of a disturbing phenomenon which received considerable media attention during the course. Class discussions regularly opened with dialogue about local, national, or global events related to multicultural education as identified by the instructor or the students themselves and consequently, media coverage of several racially themed college parties was brought up both in class and in the online discussion forum.

The group read articles about, and viewed photos of, a highly publicized racially themed party that featured White college students dressed in "ghetto" attire, with some individuals in blackface. This included an article about one of these parties that had taken place within their own institution.

Several preservice teachers in the course responded by equating these parties with "White Trash" parties portraying stereotypes of Whites in low socioeconomic groups that they had either heard of or attended themselves. The instructor juxtaposed the two types of parties, framing them with the power plus prejudice definition of racism to encourage them to consider the possibility that they were not exactly the same. However, students resisted.

One student commented, "I disagree. 'Golf pro and tennis ho' parties make fun of rich White kids—it's the same thing." Comments like these contested the working definition of racism for the class, which incorporated the idea that institutional power and privilege are primarily held by members of dominant groups, such as Whites, males, and heterosexuals.

Resistance to this definition continued into conversations about affirmative action and scholarship programs for students of color. Reading and course discussions centered on issues of social reproduction and how institutional systems, including K-12

schooling, contribute to the perpetuation of the status quo.

Despite the instructor's focus on unequal opportunity, which included detailed descriptions of systemic ways in which people of color and others are marginalized through hiring and college admission processes, several White preservice teachers in the course proclaimed that programs of this nature were examples of "reverse racism." After stating that not all students have equal access to the university and exploring the racialized nature of "legacy" at predominantly White institutions, the instructor received the following response:

> But poor White people in trailer parks don't have access either…It sounds like reverse racism. I can't agree with you. I have a friend from home who is Puerto Rican and she got a scholarship. I didn't get a dime, so I'm thinking, 'you bitch!'

Another preservice teacher chimed in, expressing frustration from opening emails advertising scholarships that were "all for minority students." These comments reflected resistance to the concept of White privilege and demonstrate the propensity of students to move analysis away from race, often on to issues of class and socioeconomic status.

Also, despite the instructor's lead, most students refused to acknowledge the benefits of diversity in the teaching force and the possible value added to their preparation by learning with and from preservice teachers of color. It is possible that this is at least partially attributed to the colorblind ideology held by many White preservice teachers.

Resistance to Border Crossing

One particularly interesting manifestation of resistance occurred in response to a paper assigned by the instructor asking students to cross cultural borders (Giroux, 1992). The project, a cultural immersion reflection, asked the students to select a cultural group with which they did not identify and to explore it through a variety of ethnographic methods. When reviewing the assignment in class, the instructor specified that the preservice teachers would be required to choose an ethnic group outside of their own racial umbrella (White, African American/Black, Latino/Hispanic, Asian, Native American).

A cohort of women in the class had participated in a study abroad program sponsored by the school of education. Instead of welcoming an opportunity to explore a new and unfamiliar culture, a representative of this group asked the instructor if they would be allowed to count this past experience as their cultural immersion, and more specifically whether or not they could complete the assignment by examining White people living in London.

Other preservice teachers outside of this cohort also explicitly inquired about conducting immersion experiences with another ethnic group, but remaining within the White racial category. In keeping with the assignment, and likely the broader goals of the course, the instructor persisted with the original directions, encouraging students to cross racial and cultural lines and suggesting that the London cohort members investigate Islam in the context of London.

It is important to note that the assignment did not ask the preservice teachers to approach strangers, and instead suggested choosing "one cultural group with whom they currently work or have significant interaction." However, due to limited experiences with individuals of color, students may have misinterpreted the assignment. In many cases, White preservice and inservice teachers' primary experiences with Americans of color are the ones they have with the students of color in their classes (Howard, 1999; Sleeter, 1992).

These requests to alter the cultural immersion assignment were somewhat indicative of preservice teachers' lack of recognition of their own students and their families as sources of cultural knowledge, or sources of knowledge that could play a part in the enhancement of their own teaching. In addition, fieldwork in urban schools, when not paired with thorough race and class analysis, can lead to reinforcement of existing stereotypes about diverse students (Milner, 2006; Sleeter, 2001; Vavrus, 2002).

The cultural immersion assignment and the interactions related to it uncovered some of these stereotypes as well as introducing the question of how comfortable teachers feel, or do not feel, entering the communities of the students that they teach.

Later in the course, open discussion about crossing both cultural and geographical borders led to heated debate. The instructor raised the claim that effective teachers, particularly of culturally and linguistically diverse students, are closely connected to, if not living in, the communities from which their students come. Preservice teachers in the class were particularly defensive and resistant to this claim, reacting with comments such as, "I want to teach in Camden, but it's dangerous. Do I live there?" and "What are they going to do to me?"

These comments uncovered problematic perceptions of students and the family members of students in urban areas. The instructor addressed this and challenged the group to examine the assumptions made about "dangerous" schools and communities through several prompts. For one prompt, the instructor pointed out that most major school shootings occurred in middle-class or affluent suburbs, with the perpetrators being White teenage males. The majority of students resisted despite this point being reiterated by video materials viewed during course meetings. One woman retorted with, "But in urban areas the shootings and crime are going on outside of the school building on the streets."

During the course the instructor asked the preservice teachers in the class, "How many of you want to teach in urban areas?" About half of the students responded positively by raising their hands. Coupled with the statements of apprehension above, I determined that there were missionary overtones to preservice teacher thinking about working with students in urban areas, and a desire to make their classrooms "safe havens" for students to escape from their unstable home lives.

Christine Clark (1999) warns that this outlook perpetuates a brand of colonialism, and the "White as rescuer" mythology often reinforced in the media. The teacher education program in which this course is embedded reinforces the idea of "getting to know your students" as an essential component to successful teaching. This idea is widely, if not universally accepted, by both preservice and inservice teachers.

However, judging by comments such as those above, the process of learning about students and building relationships with them seems to be conceptualized in limited ways. I would argue that many teachers feel comfortable inviting parents and community members into their classrooms to share cultural stories, demonstrations, or artifacts with their students. In contrast, many are resistant to methods of tapping into student "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992) that involve entering contexts outside of the classroom, including home visits and participation in community events.

The Question of Responsibility

White preservice teachers in the course often asserted their alliance with

the struggle to end injustices based on race, but failed to recognize themselves as to blame for any form of racial oppression, either blatant or subversive. Not only did they deny this responsibility for themselves, but also for those that they identified as part of their peer group.

Namely, when asked to respond to an online post featuring the racially-themed college parties, many defended the college students in the photographs. Although these students had committed a blatantly racist act, several preservice teachers argued that because racism was not the intention that these parties and similar occurrences should not be labeled in this way. Written posts included the following:

> I'm not sure how I feel about these parties. I'm pretty torn because on the one hand I can see how it was obviously offensive to the black community. Stuffing the back of your pants to mock what you believe is a characteristic of black women is ridiculous and very shallow. At the same time, I do not think that the individuals who threw these parties had any racist intent. Themed parties are just that, parties. Something to do on the weekend for fun. Of course fun at the expense of someone else is not good, but it wasn't meant to enhance some racial divide on campus.

In follow up discussions in class, some students admitted to either attending or knowing friends who had attended parties of this nature. As mentioned earlier, some brought the focus back to issues of socioeconomic class while others, as in the examples above, condoned the behavior because it was not meant to evoke racial conflict but rather to have "fun" or "a good time." Ahlquist (1991) describes similar responses from students in her course. "Most students agreed that racism and sexism were everywhere. They insisted, however, that they were neither responsible for, nor engaged in racist or sexist practices" (p. 162).

Although most students were resistant to the concept of White privilege, some showed evidence of beginning a process of acceptance or at least acknowledgment of it. However, this was not associated with a responsibility to take on antiracist identities or actions. Instead many preservice teachers conceptualized their responsibilities as being limited to creating awareness for their future students, and not involving making changes to their own lives or lifestyles.

> I do believe if the opportunity arose, I should join in the action for racial equality. Yet, I do not believe that relinquishing

privilege is the means to this equality. I would be willing to join in the fight, although am not sure as to how much of a sacrifice I would make. Being sensitive to the issue is a given, as I consider my privilege now an acknowledged privilege. Still, as [name] stated, minority groups must be responsible to lead the quest for change. I am sympathetic to these issues and would love to make a difference, but leadership must come from the minority group. I totally agree that I have a responsibility as an educator to make my students all aware of this situation.

Clearly, this student sees her role in the fight for racial equality as a passive one. She begins her response with the phrase, "if the opportunity arose," which shows that she does not think this opportunity has presented itself, nor does she envision herself as a catalyst in creating it. The role of creating awareness is not paired with one of taking action. Elizabeth Denevi and Nicholas Pastan (2006) note a pattern for White students to be "on board" with the cause if they are not being asked to change their own lives significantly, as is echoed by this preservice teacher's stance against relinquishing privilege to solve the problem.

These types of responses are viewed as another manifestation of White privilege, in which Whites substitute recognition of and guilt over privilege in place of real action (Denevi & Pastan, 2006; Levine-Rasky, 2000). Additionally, the lack of action or desire to act against racism is also traced to the belief that racism does not affect Whites directly, and is a cause only for "the other" (Denevi & Pastan, 2006; Gillespie, Ashbaugh, & DeFiore, 2002). White preservice teachers need exposure to these powerful examples of their contemporaries engaging in authentic social change and ally behavior to help motivate them move beyond awareness and into action (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005; Gillespie et al., 2002).

Renegotiating Reality

Attempts to renegotiate previously "colorblind" visions were evident through preservice teacher comments made in support of the content presented, standing out among a sea of resistance. It is important to note that no individual in the class was a constant resistor or acceptor of the content, but instead would offer a combination of resistant and nonresistant remarks. This demonstrated the back and forth nature that characterizes the process of becoming an antiracist, multicultural person (Nieto & Bode, 2008).

Although still struggling with recognizing overt racism, as evidenced by responses to the racially-themed college parties, preservice teachers became more adept at naming racist acts or comments they had seen or heard in their daily lives. Even the elements of the content that received the most resistance had been reconsidered by the conclusion of the course. For example, on the issue of spending time in communities with reputations as "bad" neighborhoods, one student countered with:

> I had a roommate who was mugged in the center of Wentfield [pseudonym] (affluent town), so there you go. Despite how you may feel, it's home to them (students), so you don't want to pass on that it's a scary place.

In addition to the contentious issue of border crossing, some preservice teachers showed evidence of rethinking the working definition of racism used for the class, which was fodder for several resistant comments throughout the course.

> Oh, and then, by the definition of racism that we used in class. I understand it, but I don't think I still agree with it because I still think discrimination is discrimination, but…I don't know. But I say I agree with it. So yeah, I guess for that. I guess I lied. Sorry. I completely understand it, but I don't think that I would use it as my definition. Although when people have said stuff um, like they'll say a racist comment and then say 'Wait, was that racist?' and I'm like, 'Yes it is, because…" and then I explain it, so I guess maybe I'm getting it more, but…

This data shows evidence of this preservice teacher's process of negotiating her own definition of racism based on her preconceptions as well as new information gained from the course and instructor. John Raible and Jason Irizarry (2007) view this internal negotiation as falling within "a postmodern view of identity in which one subject can be said to occupy multiple, even competing or contradictory, subject positions at the same time" (p. 193).

The empirical work conducted by Elinor Brown (2004) in her own multicultural education course reflects the same idea of individual students holding conflicting opinions on a topic and leaning towards one viewpoint or the other depending on the community or context.

> The study found that students may vacillate between acceptance and rejection of multicultural tenets (accepting some rejecting others) or (accepting/rejecting information when presented) depending on (1) when and how the information is

conveyed, (2) their concept of "self" at that point, (3) congruity of the information with current perceptions, and (4) their ability to develop alliances with peers for ego protection." (p. 139)

Preservice teachers not only contradicted themselves within the duration of the course, but sometimes within a singular class period, or in some cases within minutes of a previous statement. Although this could be interpreted as lack of conviction, in this context it is considered a natural and necessary component in the development of multicultural educators. Preservice teachers do not change their entire world view with a single incident but rather a series of events and interactions in both informal and formal settings, making it a "slow and stumbling journey" (Cochran-Smith, 2004) rather than a race to a finish line.

Alternate Interpretations

With the theoretical framework of this research in mind, I recognize that my ethnographic description of preservice teacher resistance to multicultural education course content offers only one of many potential perspectives. For example, the recurring silences noted could perhaps be attributed to a combination of personalities, and those who chose not to participate in discussions may have been following a long established pattern of not participating in any class discussions, regardless of the course or content.

Voiced opposition to content can also be interpreted in multiple ways. Although the statements made were often in conflict with pillars of multicultural education, such as the acknowledgement of racism and privilege, the very action of making these statements aligns strongly with another important pillar—the practice of being a critical consumer of information. In this respect, resistance can be construed as a positive response. "It can be viewed as a healthy response to controversial material, as critical questioning, and as a lack of willingness by students to conform blindly to the expectations of others" (Ahlquist, 1991).

In regards to resistance to course assignments, I would be remiss to ignore the possibility that these preservice teachers were struck with a case of "senioritis," given the placement of the course in the final year of study. To what degree were they engaged in the practice of "doing school" (Pope, 2001) and trying to coast through the semester, or in other words,

do the least amount of work necessary to receive an acceptable overall grade? Perhaps the preservice teachers concentrated their efforts into written assignments rather than class discussion, knowing that participation was included in grading but not weighted as heavily.

Similarly, resistance to the cultural immersion project may have emerged from a desire to save time rather than feelings of apprehension. Although I name resistance as the driving force behind these behaviors, others may consider these academic evaluation factors to have a greater role.

Implications for Teacher Education

These findings have important implications for teacher education in terms of program and course design as well as the ground level of instructor/student interaction. First and foremost, it is imperative for teacher education programs to introduce multicultural education and social foundations coursework early in preservice teachers' experience. Brown (2004) reported that the juniors in her study showed more growth in cultural sensitivity than the seniors or graduate students, which contrasted with her hypothesis that students with higher educational attainment would be more willing to embrace cross-cultural differences. Although long term gains from stand-alone courses are rare (Sleeter, 2001), when substantial gains are made, age and class rank can prove to be a critical factor.

Not only should multicultural education be introduced earlier, but it should also be sustained as a central component to teacher preparation. As exists now in isolated pockets with dependence on individual course selection and faculty dispositions, an indirect message is sent by schools of education that issues of culture are an afterthought rather than a controlling factor permeating all facets of teaching and learning in school and community contexts.

When viewing teacher education as a curriculum, this is a form of the "add in" approach that multicultural educators warn against. This same approach was likely practiced in the K-12 schools that today's preservice teachers attended, resulting in their simplified definitions of culture. These incomplete definitions include visions of culture as fixed or static, and easily broken down into categories like food, music, and behavior. (Hoffman, 1996).

On the level of instructor/student interaction, instructors' understanding of preservice teachers' preconceptions and

existing world views is a crucial factor in minimizing resistance and misinterpretations of multicultural education pedagogy and content (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005; King, 1991). Instructors face a unique challenge to appeal to students' tendencies and preferences to view the world on personal terms in order to engage them, but to persist in challenging them to participate in institutional and sociological analyses.

Diane Gillespie, Leslie Ashbaugh, and JoAnn DeFiore (2002) relate ways in which sharing their own stories of struggle to "act justly and remain race cognizant" have reached their preservice teachers, but warn against overemphasis on the personal. "Dwelling on the personal…can inadvertently devalue the need for our white middle-class women students to undertake and participate in larger social reform movements" (p. 246).

Roberta Ahlquist (1991) argues that it is not only important to help preservice teachers become aware of the role they are asked to play in perpetuating oppression as educators, but also to aid them to "find ways to take an oppositional stance to an oppressive role" (p. 158). One way to do this is to offer accessible examples of Whites, and White educators specifically, enacting multiple identities and participating in social change and ally behavior.

Clark (1999) describes herself as an "antiracist racist," stating that in order to make progress toward becoming an antiracist, you must simultaneously admit to your identity as a racist. Raible and Irizarry (2007) present accounts of teachers who have developed what they call "post-White" identities that allow them to successfully connect with and advocate for their students of color. Gillespie, Ashbaugh, and DeFiore (2002) respond to students' accusations of "White bashing," by describing how they have created alternate White identities that allow them to simultaneously own their White privilege and "be proactive in changing societal circumstances" (p. 245).

Until Whites arrive at an understanding of the fact that they are also negatively impacted by racism, and that the benefits of antiracism outweigh those of racism, the willingness to take action will remain low (Clark & O'Donnell, 1999; Denevi & Pastan, 2006). Consequently, multicultural educators are charged with making these benefits visible and tangible for preservice teachers.

For this reason, it is important for multicultural educators to continue to promote border crossing and dialogue

with cultural "others," despite resistance that they may receive. These immersion opportunities, when matched with deep reflection and analyses, have great potential to demonstrate these benefits in a meaningful way.

Through multicultural education courses, White preservice teachers have the opportunity to gain insights into the lived realities of their students, which can lead them to renegotiate new identities and realities that include color and culture both inside the classroom and outside its doors. Until teacher education programs undertake reforms to weave concepts of multiculturalism into foundations and methods coursework, multicultural education classrooms will remain the only space in which this renegotiation is encouraged and supported. These circumstances make reaching an understanding of the interactions and dynamics within the formal multicultural education classroom even more crucial.

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